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Issued three times a year

Subscriptions:

€14 per year within Europe and the Middle East
\$20 per year to the USA
Individual copies 150 czk

Enquiries regarding subscriptions to Denise@ibts.cz

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ISSN 1213 – 1520
Registration Number: MK ČR E 10511

International Baptist Theological Seminary
of the European Baptist Federation, o.p.s.
Nad Habrovkou 3, Jenerálka, Praha 6, CZ 164 00
Czech Republic

IČO: 25741683

Produced by the IBTS Journal Team

The J D Hughey Memorial Lectures

6 – 8 November 2006

IBTS is delighted to welcome **Dr H W Walker Pipkin**, one time Director of the Institute of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, for the 2006 Lectures.

Dr Pipkin will be focussing on the life and work of the great Anabaptist figure, Balthasar Hubmaier, who led the Anabaptist community in Mikulov, Moravia in the early 1500s. Dr Pipkin, with John Howard Yoder, translated the major works of Hubmaier into English and is one of the foremost authorities on the Anabaptists of Switzerland and south Germany/Austria.

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Dr John David Hughey, after whom the lecture series is named, joined the IBTS Rüşchlikon faculty in 1952 after serving as a missionary in Spain for eight years. He was President of the Seminary from 1960 to 1964. In 1964 he was named Director (at that time, Secretary) for Europe, the Middle East and South Asia for the Foreign Mission Board, SBC, retiring in 1981. Known as a missionary leader and a scholar, Dr Hughey is remembered for his commitment to European Baptist life and mission.

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Journal of European Baptist Studies

Volume seven

No. 1

September 2006

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Editorial

As I write this editorial IBTS is the venue for the conference of the Societas Oecumenica. The theme for this year's conference – held for the first time at a Baptist institution – is 'Ecumenism of Life as a Challenge for Academic Theology'. During the conference attention is being paid to the varieties of ecumenical experiences. There is reflection on whether the churches have to engage more in common witness as an illustration of the ecumenism of life.

Although this issue of JEBS is not directly on the theme of ecumenism, I think there is a link with 'ecumenism of life'. Toivo Pilli's article deals with a broad theme: how Christians are to live in a persecuting state. This is not a situation that is confined to believers from any one Christian tradition, although it is minority faith communities that often suffer most from state oppression. This thought-provoking study offers a wide historical and theological perspective while at the same time giving detailed attention to the particular, including personal experiences.

Alex Kish offers us the results of a fascinating historical investigation into one of the significant figures of Baptist beginnings in continental Europe, Johann Rottmayer. He is generally believed by Hungarian Baptists to have been the first Hungarian Baptist, converted under the ministry of Johann Oncken in Hamburg. However, it has been claimed that towards the end of his life he became a Seventh-Day Adventist. As it happens, another recent event on the IBTS campus, in which I was involved, was the first official dialogue between representatives of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Within our discussions we talked about how to interpret certain historical events. Our understanding of the past shapes our understanding of the future. Alex Kish shows the value of giving careful attention to the evidence in ecumenical dialogue.

The third article, by Alec Gilmore, takes up the theme of wilderness and connects this with environmental issues. In looking at this area, one to which IBTS is strongly committed, from a fresh perspective, Alec Gilmore encourages new connections to be made between theology and practice. Again, since these concerns are shared by many Christians – and of course many non-Christians – we may think of 'ecumenism of life'. Finally, Tim Grass reports on on-going ecumenical dialogue between Evangelicals and Orthodox and to the 'exciting opportunities' for building up the whole body of Christ that seem to be before us.

The Revd Dr Ian M Randall

Christians as Citizens of a Persecuting State: A Theological and Ethical Reflection from a Historical Perspective

It was the early 1980s in Estonia, then one of the Soviet Republics. At the doorway of a lecture hall in Tartu University's main building a man was waiting for me. 'We need to talk', he said, and insisted that we should meet in a nearby hotel after my lecture. There was no doubt that he was a KGB officer. I was a philology student at the University, and actively involved in a local church: sometimes preaching, regularly taking part in Christian youth group meetings, and very interested in theology.

The invitation posed a dilemma for me. To go to the meeting could be interpreted by the authorities as the first step towards co-operation. I did not want to give that message. What if I refused to go? The KGB would find me anyway. Perhaps it would be better to go and see what they wanted and not to postpone the unpleasant interview. I also asked myself: isn't it true that God has somehow allowed even suppressive power structures, and a Christian should – at least to a certain extent – obey the commands of these structures? I tried to imagine what would happen during the interview. What if they begin to ask questions about other believers, about information relating to local churches, about Christian typewritten publications... How could I answer such questions without betraying friends or causes, for even silence becomes information? And after the meeting? What will I say if the KGB demands that I should not tell anybody about the interview? Shall I agree, but tell anyway, at least share something with my friends? That would be lying to the KGB... And could it be that my fellow Christians might misinterpret my story? Could it destroy the atmosphere of trust and friendship? But remaining silent... how is that compatible with honesty and integrity? I felt trapped, guilty and powerless.

I did not think then that similar questions had already been asked and similar feelings already felt by many others through the long tradition of Christian experience of living under an oppressive state. Further, there was little information about the persecution of Christians in other countries. For example, the Christians in Estonia hardly knew about Archbishop Romero's martyrdom in 1980 in El Salvador, as a result of his attempts to be a 'spokesman for those to whom no one would listen'.¹ The dilemma of

¹ S Bergman, ed., *Martyrs* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), p. 77.

the Church in Pinochet Chile, whether publicly to take sides with the oppressed or to use methods of diplomatic manoeuvring,² – these belonged on the other side of the ‘iron curtain’. Even Stalin’s oppression of Christians in the 1930s was not much spoken of.

In the Soviet context, both individual Christians, and the Christian church as a community, tended to react spontaneously to the oppressive context, while theological and ethical reflection required some distance from the experience of persecution. In this paper an attempt is made to explore some of the questions posed to Christians living in hostile contexts. The discussion is put into a historical perspective.

Obey God rather than men: Early Church experience

The issue of how Christians should, as citizens, relate to an unfriendly or overtly persecuting state is as old as the story of Christianity itself. The New Testament reflects some of the Early Christian approaches to this theme: Paul suggested that Christians should submit themselves to the governing authorities, not only because of possible punishment but because political authorities were ordained by God (Romans 13:1-7). However, the Early Church soon ran into conflicts with the Roman authorities, as Christians ‘refused to concede the state’s absolute power if its commands contravened those of God’.³ Some passages in the Book of Revelation (e.g., chapter 13) give a much less favourable picture of state powers when compared to that of Paul in Romans 13. Even Paul himself saw suffering and persecution as a *sine qua non* of being in Christ.⁴ Later, in the history of the western church, the dualistic relation between Church and State, between Jerusalem and Babylon, was never satisfactorily solved, and continued to create tensions.⁵ For example, though both Luther and Calvin believed that the temporal government and spiritual authorities functioned in different realms, in practice they had difficulties keeping these two ‘kingdoms’ separate.⁶

² See William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998).

³ Roland Bainton, *Christianity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), p. 58.

⁴ John S Pobee, ‘Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul’. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series 6 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), p. 107.

⁵ W Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), pp. 537, 569.

⁶ David M Whitford, ‘Luther’s political encounters’, in Donald K McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 189-190; ‘Civil government’, in Donald K McKim, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). In general, Lutheran church-state theory yielded relatively large powers to the State while Reformed theologies encouraged the faithful to hold civil authorities to constant account.

During the first centuries, Christian loyalty to God was frequently interpreted by the Roman state authorities as disloyalty to their state. The Roman understanding of religion generally focused on civil virtues and outward observance. Even the public sacrifices ‘were simply a routine genuflection to the government’, and, as Paul Johnson stated, ‘on the vast majority of Rome’s citizens and subjects they imposed no burden of conscience’.⁷ However, the Christians’ view tended to be different for they added theological and ethical evaluation to all civil acts. When Christians opposed an imperial cult they seemed to deny the emperor’s right to rule.⁸ This is why Pliny the Younger explained his practice of dealing with Christians: if for three times they did not deny being Christians, he sentenced them to death, because ‘whatever kind of crime it may be to which they have confessed, their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy should certainly be punished’.⁹ Christians often found guidance in the attitude of the first apostles: ‘We must obey God rather than men’ (Acts 4:19-20, 5:29), a curiously subversive text when compared with Romans 13. In many cases popular superstitions added to the picture. Tertullian said that Christians were blamed ‘for every public disaster and every misfortune’ that befell the people. ‘If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence...’¹⁰ – Christians were made the scapegoats. Tension between the divine and earthly authority, accusations of disloyalty or of being disruptive of the state’s unity, and the exercise of popular superstitions – all these themes came to be repeated in the story of persecution.

However, Christians met new challenges when they turned from being a persecuted minority into becoming a privileged majority after the Constantinian reform of the fourth century. Social pressure and legal compulsion, and sometimes a hope of improving one’s standing in society, emerged at that time as new motives for converting to Christianity. ‘To adopt the emperor’s religion could promote one’s chances in the world.’¹¹ Later in history, for example for a period in the early 1990s, after Communism collapsed in the former Soviet Union regions, Christians in Eastern Europe faced similar issues: how to adjust to the rapid change from

⁷ Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (Norwich: Pelican Books, 1982) p. 6.

⁸ Justo L Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1 (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), p. 41.

⁹ Pliny the Younger, Epp. X (ad Traj.), XCVI, in Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 3.

¹⁰ Tertullian, Apology, XL. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 47.

¹¹ John McManners, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 63.

a persecuted group into a socially respected force. This transition was found to be difficult. After the Constantinian reform, some latent tensions – doctrinal, disciplinary and personal – came out into the open: ‘The Christians had won, but the attitude of the survivors reflected the bitterness of the struggle.’¹² The emergence of similar phenomena can be traced in the post-persecution situation in the former Soviet Union, where unity was endangered not only by previous atheistic pressures but also by the unexpectedness of freedom. One of the clearest examples was in the Ukraine, where for almost 60 years there was only one legal Orthodox church; since 1989 the country has been compelled to face a situation where four Orthodox churches are competing for influence.¹³

Beyond this, the traumatic experience of persecution needs to be evaluated. The past needs to be reconciled with the present. Both martyrs and apostates belong to this picture. In the case of the Early (Medieval) Church, the martyrs shaped the theological and behavioural patterns of Christians, both in the east and in the west. Heated discussions about the rehabilitation of lapsed adherents in the Early Church only emphasised the need for a process of repentance and forgiveness inside the Christian community after a period of outside pressure. Scripture was quoted both in favour of rigor and in favour of mercy.¹⁴ In their context, churches in Asia Minor were rather ‘modest’ in their requirements for penitence: the fallen were readmitted after three to five years of penitence, and even traitors who had denounced their fellow Christians to the authorities might be rehabilitated after ten years’ probation.¹⁵ Though present day Christians may have different opinions about the methods of repentance, the need to become reconciled with the persecution experiences, find forgiveness for compromises, and interpret heroic episodes, is a continuous task for Christians in the post-persecution period.

Waldenses: keeping identity in persecution

Persecution of Christians by state structures took place not only in the non-Christian setting of the first centuries. The rejection of non-conformists and their suppression happened also within Christendom, when state and ecclesiastical patterns were intertwined. In the context of Medieval and Reformation-period Christendom, several dissenting groups experienced

¹² Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, p. 537.

¹³ S P Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics and Social Change in East-Central Europe and Russia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 246.

¹⁴ McManners, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, p. 45.

¹⁵ Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, p. 538.

persecution and had to respond to theological and ethical challenges that emerged from this experience. In the following sections a reference is made to only two of these movements: the Waldenses and the Anabaptists.

The Waldensian dissent existed in Europe from the twelfth century until the Reformation when they issued a confession of faith ‘that marked them as a Reformed Protestant group’.¹⁶ The Waldenses emphasised the lay preachers’ role in proclaiming the Gospel and a commitment to poverty. They refused to take oaths, and strongly believed that the Word of God had to be applied to the letter.¹⁷ In the initial stages, the movement, though unorthodox in many respects, was tolerated by the official church and there were cases when the Waldenses abjured their views.¹⁸

Nevertheless, after the 1230s, the Waldenses’ social and religious behaviour was increasingly changed by the continuous threat of inquisition.¹⁹ Persecuted by ecclesiastical and temporal powers, the Waldenses formed underground, secret networks. They faced a painful dilemma: to preach publicly, a conviction which was a part of their identity, or to restrain themselves from public expansion of their ideas in order to survive. By the thirteenth century the majority of Waldensian communities had chosen the latter option. They had become unobtrusive; ‘outwardly the Waldensians looked like lukewarm Catholics’.²⁰ Like many other persecuted communities, they had to cope with the question of what the price was for their survival. Gabriel Audisio has suggested that the Waldensians were forcibly obliged not only to hide their convictions but to allay suspicion by paying lip-service to opinions they reprobated. However, this was a sign of fear, and so a source of guilt.²¹ There is no doubt that their experiences also shaped their understanding of what a Christian community should be: according to their view, it was a fellowship of dedicated members who expressed mutual support for each other. However, there was also a sense of exclusiveness – belonging to the elect.

¹⁶ ‘Waldenses’, in *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, ed. by Jerald C Brauer (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971).

¹⁷ Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival c. 1170-c.1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 11.

¹⁸ Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 11-60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-68.

²⁰ Bernard Hamilton, *The Medieval Inquisition* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), p. 91.

²¹ Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent*, p. 88. Cameron has pointed out that the Waldenses’ partaking of church ministrations may not have been a deliberate pretence, but due to the fact that many medieval ‘anti-clericals were also conventionally devout’. Though they may have kept their views secret they often ‘did not hide themselves from the rest of the congregation’. Euan Cameron, *Waldenses*, pp. 109-110. However, Audisio has rightly drawn attention to the psychological and ethical tension created by a hostile context and the fear of persecution.

A kind of superiority complex is frequently the case among persecuted minorities.²²

The Waldenses' case, though rooted in a concrete historical background, helps to illuminate the dilemma of many Christians during an age of suppression: how far is it possible to go with self-censure and compromise without losing one's theological identity and ethical integrity?

There has been a wide range of answers to this question. In the early fourth century a Christian, engaged in a lawsuit over property in Alexandria, was able to give a pagan friend power of attorney to act on his behalf and participate in an act of idolatry which was a condition of litigation. Though feeling uneasy about this solution, he could present his case and at the same time avoid persecution.²³ In the Soviet Union, many Christians took part in the 'strictly voluntary' demonstrations to celebrate the October Revolution, a symbolic act that at least indirectly gave honour to the atheistic state. They 'fulfilled their responsibility as citizens', but in their hearts they did not agree with the values that this public ceremony represented. After World War II the Russian Orthodox Church frequently praised Stalin as 'the greatest friend of all believers', and denied in public statements any intolerance or persecution in the USSR.²⁴ Other churches also voiced similar statements. And even if public support for the persecuting state could be avoided on the level of individual Christians, choosing a low profile as a Christian would easily result in losing one's identity as a believer. Analysing the story of the Waldenses, Audisio stated that the self-repression, both on individuals and on Christian groups cannot be total and lasting; it will either break down or their identity dissimulated and lost altogether.²⁵

Anabaptist separation theology

The Early Anabaptists, whether broadly or narrowly defined, when compared to the Waldenses, maintained more visibility and audibility in the sixteenth-century scene. They 'did not actively seek clashes with a secular authority',²⁶ nevertheless, the conflicts with ecclesial and temporal powers came to be the mark of their journey in history. James Stayer has stated that at least 679 Anabaptists were executed in Switzerland and the South

²² Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent*, p. 37.

²³ McManners, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, p. 45.

²⁴ Tatiana Chumachenko, *Church and State in Soviet Russia: Russian Orthodoxy from World War II to the Khrushchev Years* (Armonk, New York: M E Sharpe, 2002), p. 53.

²⁵ Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent*, p. 89.

²⁶ Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *The Anabaptists* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 97.

German areas between 1527 and 1533.²⁷ Persecuted in one region, they fled to another, thus spreading their convictions. The Count of Alzey is reported to have exclaimed: 'What shall I do, the more I execute, the more they increase.'²⁸ This was neither the first nor the last time in history when persecution, paradoxically, was a ferment for the mission of the church. However, there were also places where the Anabaptist movement was totally wiped out.

What was the Anabaptists' response to a hostile environment? Though it would be more appropriate to talk about a variety of responses, with the risk of oversimplification it is possible to say that separatism from, and the boycott of, the persecuting structures came to dominate Anabaptist views regarding suppressive powers. Among these religious radicals, the division from life in the world was emphasised by prohibition of oath-swearing, which was 'an essential glue in early modern civic affairs'.²⁹ Their view of the believer's church and the rejection of infant baptism placed them outside the established ecclesial and social structures, and 'attacked the foundations of the spiritual and temporal social form of the *corpus Christianum*'.³⁰ A clear boundary was drawn between government and the congregation, a dualism which reflected basic differences between the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light, flesh and spirit, Belial and Christ.³¹ John H Yoder has pointed out that it was the persecution-experience that imposed separation on the Anabaptists 'against their will', and that they continued to affirm the legitimacy of the civil order,³² though within the limits of the temporal sphere. Nevertheless, for these radical believers, the focus was on the spiritual realm.

Tendencies towards separation, both theologically and even in practical terms, shaped Anabaptist realities. However, this feature is not only distinctive of Anabaptists, for it can be found among many persecuted Christian communities. In the case of the Anabaptists, persecution and separation came to mould their understanding of being a church. Indeed, 'brotherhood' would be a more appropriate term for the fellowship groups

²⁷ James Stayer, 'The Anabaptist Revolt and Political and Religious Power', in Benjamin and Calvin Redekop, eds., *Power, Authority and the Anabaptist Tradition* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 57.

²⁸ William Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 75.

²⁹ Stayer, 'The Anabaptist Revolt', p. 56.

³⁰ Goertz, *The Anabaptists*, p. 129.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³² John H Yoder, '“Anabaptists and the Sword” Revisited: Systematic Historiography and Undogmatic Nonresistants', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 85 (1974), p. 139.

they formed in the early stages.³³ Perhaps the only exception was in Moravia, where the Early Anabaptist groups became better organised, due to a higher degree of religious toleration in the area.³⁴ In general, the Anabaptist ideal of church life was restricted by civil authorities, but it only deepened their understanding that the true church manifests itself in fellowship, unity of the spirit, and in the celebration of the Lord's Supper³⁵ – even if they had to meet secretly. This is certainly not to say that the outside pressure was the only phenomenon moulding their ecclesiological views, but it is possible to argue that suffering can offer a key for understanding not only a church-state or church-society relationship but also the dynamics within the persecuted Christian communities. Balthasar Hubmaier, explaining the meaning of the Lord's Supper, said that it is a public testimony of love, 'in which one brother pledges himself to another before the church. Just as they are now breaking bread and eating with one another, and sharing the cup, so each will offer up body and blood for the other, relying on the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.'³⁶

Suffering required interpretation. The majority of Anabaptists interpreted their experience of being persecuted within a Christological perspective. Menno Simons believed that Christ left an example that his disciples should follow. Jesus' words, interpreted literally, and his life, became 'the central ethical measures for Menno, as they had become also for the Swiss [Brethren] and the Hutterites'.³⁷ Christ suffered, and thus his followers also have to suffer. Walter Klaassen has stated that for Anabaptists, the physical and spiritual suffering 'served as a theological integrator, prompting the rediscovery of the early church's view of Christ's suffering continuing in his members.'³⁸ As early as 1524 Conrad Grebel wrote: 'And if thou must suffer for it [for faithfulness to the Scriptures], thou knowest well that it cannot be otherwise. Christ must suffer still more in his members.'³⁹ The outside pressure moved Anabaptists towards a deeper identification with the suffering Christ – 'not merely following his

³³ Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism, An Interpretation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1998), pp. 115-116.

³⁴ George H Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, 1992), p. 315.

³⁵ Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, p. 118.

³⁶ Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline. Selected Primary Sources* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), p. 194.

³⁷ Arnold C Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1995), p. 213.

³⁸ Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline*, p. 85.

³⁹ Conrad Grebel, 'Postscript or Second Letter to Thomas Müntzer, September 5, 1524', in G H Williams and A M Mergal, eds., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 84.

example or suffering on his behalf'.⁴⁰ In addition, the Anabaptists were forced to interpret martyrdom, which was for them not only theoretical but an actual option. The 'Martyrs' Mirror' and the Hutterite 'Geschicht Buch' became a sort of 'martyrs' theologies', where martyrdom was defined as *imitatio Christi* or rather as *participatio Christi*, and often seen in an apocalyptic perspective.⁴¹

Surprisingly, some parallel features between sixteenth-century European dissent and the twentieth-century Latin American context can be found. William Cavanaugh, analysing the Roman Catholic Christians' experience in Pinochet Chile, talks about the 'Christoform nature of martyrdom' and 'a following in the way of the cross';⁴² that is, instead of defining martyrdom as dying for the cause of the faith. Referring to ancient martyrdom, which helped the church to gain visibility in society and to claim its identity as a disciplined community, Cavanaugh stated:

The ancient martyrs often asserted the kingship of Christ in refusing to offer worship or service to the emperors and their gods. The church was, by its nature as Christ's crucified and resurrected body, a challenge to the violence and idolatry of the secular authorities... From a theological point of view the conflict is the same; it is the conflict between Christ's body on earth and the powers of the world which refuse to recognise Christ's victory over it. Christians see acts of injustice and state violence as the continuing struggle between the people of God and the forces of death.⁴³

Anabaptists, in their own context, in many cases reached different practical conclusions when compared to the suffering Church in Latin America.⁴⁴ They would, however, have agreed with the basic Christo-centric approach and an appeal to the Early Church underlying Cavanaugh's words.

Though the Anabaptist emphasis on the fellowship of believers and on Christ-like discipleship continues to inspire churches, especially those

⁴⁰ Lavrene A Rutschman, 'Anabaptism and Liberation Theology', in Daniel S Schipani, ed., *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989), p. 62.

⁴¹ For a helpful summary of Anabaptist understanding of martyrdom, see Ethelbert Stauffer, 'The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom', in Wayne Pipkin, ed., *Essays in Anabaptist Theology* (Elkhart, Indiana: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), pp. 211-236.

⁴² William C Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ For a short comparison of Anabaptist and Liberation spiritualities, see José Miguez Bonino, 'On Discipleship, Justice and Power', in Schipani, ed., *Freedom and Discipleship: Liberation Theology in an Anabaptist Perspective*, pp. 131-138.

belonging to the Radical Reformation tradition, there was also an inclination to become closed, separated and inward looking communities. The questions are similar to those which many believers face: to withdraw into a spiritual cocoon, to yield to outside pressure, to fight back, or to find some ethical, theological and practical compromise between these options? In addition, context clearly shapes the believers' Christology, their understanding of suffering, and other aspects of theology and practice. Constant interpretation is needed, in light of scripture and communal discernment, in order to not only passively accept the external influences, but to keep the inner dynamics of the church, to react creatively to the context, and to maintain healthy resistance to the external pressures.

Persecution of Protestants in Tsarist Russia: A question of ethnic and religious identity

In the following sections of this paper two periods in the history of Eastern European Christianity will be briefly discussed. Firstly, the conflict of Slavic ethnic values and Evangelical Christianity as seen from the official tsarist (and Orthodox) point of view at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century will be presented. And secondly, some conclusions will be drawn from the situation of Christians under atheistic pressure in the Soviet Union.

Walter Sawatsky, a Mennonite scholar, has pointed out that since the nineteenth century, persecutions became 'hereditary' for Protestants, especially for Evangelicals, in the Slavic region of Europe.⁴⁵ Initially protected by their social status, even some of the Evangelicals' aristocratic leaders such as Colonel Pashkov and Count Korff were subsequently exiled from Russia, and both died in exile.⁴⁶ Exceptionally, Pashkov was allowed to return for three months in the 1890s. His dilemma was whether to visit Russia secretly or to preach publicly. As he believed that only the second option enabled him to be faithful to the New Testament model and to his evangelical identity, he decided to preach. Immediately, he was summoned by the tsar, 'ordered to leave at once and never to return'.⁴⁷ Religious convictions, for these Evangelicals, weighed more than their national belonging – and for Pashkov and Korff this resulted in exile.

⁴⁵ Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981), p. 27.

⁴⁶ Michael Rowe, *Russian Resurrection: Strength in Suffering – A History of Russia's Evangelical Church* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), pp. 27, 32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Russian speaking Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, trying to remain faithful to their convictions, often chose a position which was not advantageous for them as citizens or as members of their ethnic group. Being a Russian, for them, did not automatically mean being Orthodox. In the initial stages of the movement, many Evangelicals in Russia were left without legal rights: their marriages – if not conducted by an Orthodox priest – were invalid, and their children were consequently considered to be illegitimate.⁴⁸ After the so-called Tolerance Manifesto of 1905 several Evangelicals who had been exiled or imprisoned returned home. For example, Feodor Kostronin had been in exile for sixteen years and in prison for nine, and Vasili Ivanov-Klyshnikov had been twice in exile and thirty-one times in prison.⁴⁹ Though there were other ethnic groups represented among Evangelicals, such as Germans, it is interesting to see how Slavic national ideals and religious preferences caused tensions and conflict for Russian speaking Evangelicals. The state, wishing to consolidate its unity, did not like the idea that Russians might loosen their links between being Slav and Orthodox. Evangelicals, with their more ‘international’ views on religion, however, wanted to exercise this freedom, which led to difficulties.

From another aspect, close relationships between the Tsarist state and the Orthodox Church made it difficult to differentiate between the two in the persecution of Protestants, especially between 1880 and 1905 when Konstantin Pobedonostsev was the chief-procurator to the Holy Synod (a lay representative of the Tsar to the Orthodox Church administration). He exercised wide powers to persecute non-Orthodox believers, and Russian Evangelicals began to call him ‘The Russian Saul’.⁵⁰ For Pobedonostsev, religious (Orthodox) identity and ethnic (Russian) identity were inseparable, and he believed that it was the duty of a Russian man to impose Orthodoxy on others, by force, if necessary.⁵¹ Hans Brandenburg stated: ‘The unity of the people in the Orthodox faith was for him the

⁴⁸ Michael Rowe, *Russian Resurrection*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Hans Brandenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty: The Emergence of the Evangelical Movement in Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 130.

⁵⁰ Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants, Evangelicals in the Soviet Union: 1944-1964* (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), p. 47.

⁵¹ Constantine Prokhorov, ‘Orthodoxy and Baptists in Russia: The Early Period’, in Ian M Randall, ed., *Baptists and the Orthodox Church: On the way to understanding* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003), p. 105. For an extensive treatment of the emergence of the Russian Orthodox ethno-centered identity, see Parush R Parushev, ‘Narrative Paradigm of Emergence – Contextual Orthodox Theological Identity’, *Religion in Eastern Europe* XXV, 2 (May 2005), pp. 1-39 and his earlier account ‘On Some Developments in Russian Orthodox Theology and Tradition’, in Randall, ed., *Baptists and the Orthodox Church*, pp. 81-97.

guarantee of the state and its security.’⁵² His violent measures against Protestants were the consequence of political rather than religious convictions. He was profoundly convinced that Russian nationality and Orthodoxy were one, and, consequently, any deviation from Orthodoxy represented betrayal of national identity and of the Russian empire.⁵³ Accusations against Christians or Christian groups breaking the unity of a state or national identity are nothing new: these voices can be heard all through the history of Christianity. However, for Russian Protestants the question was raised: is Protestant Christianity compatible with Slavic ethnic identity? Russian Evangelicals’ attempts to solve this issue from the perspective of individual faith and religious tolerance led to conflicts with political and religious structures which rather emphasised Slavic ethnicity and Orthodox values. Also, different views on mission caused tension, and continue to do so, in Eastern Europe. An Orthodox view of ‘canonical territory’, that is the exclusive right of the Orthodox to represent the Christian faith in a given area without any competition from others, is very different from a Protestant-Evangelical understanding of mission, often focusing on the search for personal conversion.⁵⁴

Soviet persecution – leading to a split among Evangelicals

Paul Marshall has said that outside Communist (and radical Islamist) settings it is comparatively rare for someone to be repressed merely for their individual confessional beliefs if these beliefs do not affect some other facet of life. ‘It is usually the very interrelation that leads to persecution.’ For example, Marshall added, in Chiapas, Mexico, Protestants were persecuted because they refused to pay unreasonably high prices for goods to be used in religious ceremonies that they rejected.⁵⁵ However, the totalitarian regimes tend to aim at controlling citizens’ minds and attitudes. This is one reason why, for example, Nazi Germany was hostile towards religion. Nazism was ‘demanding of its adherents total submission of their

⁵² Brandenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty*, p. 119.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120, 123.

⁵⁴ For the need to rethink Orthodox and Protestant relationships in the area of mission in Eastern Europe, see Mark Elliott and Anita Deyneka, ‘Protestant Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union’, in John Witte and Michael Bourdeaux, eds., *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia. The New War for Souls* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), pp. 205-215.

⁵⁵ Paul Marshall, ed., *Religious Freedom in the World: A Global Report on Freedom and Persecution* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 2000), p. 17.

consciences and surrender of their souls'. Christianity disputed these total claims.⁵⁶ The conflict was inevitable.

Certainly, the Soviet totalitarian regime, especially in its initial stages, was interested not only in outward submission, but in active commitment to the Communist cause, with a requirement that all become active citizens. Just being a Christian was a suspicious fact in itself. In the 1930s, the Soviet Union introduced severe atheistic repressions. Several laws passed in 1928 and 1929 'confirmed a very restricted role for the churches in Soviet society'. The believers, and 'non-working elements' such as the clergy, were considered to be second-class citizens.⁵⁷ At the end of the 1950s, a campaign was launched by Khrushchev to reach a stage where all citizens followed the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism. If they did this society would be liberated from the 'survival elements of capitalism', such as faith in God. As Christians emphasised a transformational process taking place in the life of a believer, Christianity was seen as a rival to the Communist worldview.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the Soviet state learned quickly not to accuse anybody for their beliefs officially, as theoretically the government guaranteed religious freedom. As Christianity affected decision-making and behaviour, some of these facets caught the Soviet authorities' attention and were used as a pretext for persecution. Christians continued to face the issue of being marginalised. It was very unlikely that a Soviet citizen would 'encounter any evidence of church activities in his normal daily life'.⁵⁹ Believers had to cope with the many ethical and theological questions that emerged in the context of living in an atheistic society. One of these questions was of compromise. How far should they cooperate with the state, if at all? How much should they let the state shape Christian theology and practice, for example in the field of mission and evangelism or in the field of worship?

The feelings that atheistic pressure created are well described by Hans Brandenburg: '...the Bolshevik GPU [a predecessor of the KGB] continually levelled political accusations, made slanders and denunciations which could not be checked, held secret trials or took open police measures, all of which created a general insecurity and mutual suspicion. People never knew who had been suborned to act as an informer. ... [F]alse

⁵⁶ Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Pan Books, 2001), pp. 252, 255-256.

⁵⁷ Philip Walters, 'A survey of Soviet religious policy', in Sabrina P Ramet, ed., *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 13.

⁵⁸ Constantine Prokhorov, *The State and the Baptist Churches in the USSR from 1960-1980*, Unpublished research paper (Prague: IBTS, 2004), pp. 6-8.

⁵⁹ Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church, A Contemporary History* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 273.

denunciations were used to play one group off against another. As in the persecution of Christians under the old Roman emperors, now too were *lapsi* – apostates.’⁶⁰ Though referring to the pre-war period in Russia, the quotation correctly conveys the inner insecurity created among Christians by outside pressure. Maintaining the atmosphere of trust was one of the important challenges for Russian Christians in the Soviet period.

The believers also had to ask the question, what meaning does truth-telling have in an environment where the state authorities manipulate whole populations by the massaging of statistics, coercing them through repressive structures, trying to capture their minds by control of the mass media? The state systematically created a distorted picture of Christians, depicting them at best as primitive and unreasoning people or at worst as dangerous fanatics.⁶¹ At the same time, Christians, especially Christian leaders, were expected to be obedient to the state’s religious policies. Evangelical Christian-Baptist leader Jakov Zhidkov wrote in 1946 that the great October Revolution... ‘brought to our country the basic true freedom of conscience’; and praised the Stalin Constitution as ‘the most democratic of all constitutions in the world’.⁶² Did Zhidkov, having been in prison and in exile himself, write this with a hope that church members would understand his delicate position and not take his words too seriously? Was he threatened by the state authorities? Steve Durasoff seems to support these possibilities.⁶³ Nevertheless, one may also ask if Zhidkov might have thought that these and other similar eulogies were the price to be paid for permission to preach the gospel in church buildings, and he did not want to undermine this possibility? Closure of churches would have been even worse – so he chose ‘the lesser evil’. Today, compromises made by Christians in these situations cannot simply be evaluated only on a black-and-white scale.

In addition to these ethical complexities, a painful split occurred among Soviet Evangelicals in the 1960s. It was a direct outcome of the persecution of Christians in general, and the new wave of Khrushchev’s persecutions in particular. The official body of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) chose a moderate, even docile approach in their relationships with the atheistic state; they altered the union’s statutes, and suggested to local churches that the focus of Christian

⁶⁰ Brandenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty*, p. 192.

⁶¹ Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Glasgow: Collins Fontana Books, 1974), pp. 48-49.

⁶² Jakov Zhidkov, ‘Our Holidays’, *Bratskii Vestnik*, no. 2 (1946), pp. 14-15. Quoted in Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*, pp. 187-188.

⁶³ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*, p. 188.

work should be to satisfy the spiritual needs of the believers, and not attracting new members. 'In effect, the churches were made instruments of their own containment and restriction.'⁶⁴ However, there was an increasing number of those who became dissatisfied with the realities: diminished decision-making possibilities at local church level; severe restrictions on doing mission and evangelism; and the state's attempts to prohibit children's attendance at worship services in churches.

The dissatisfied group, called *initsiativniki* or Reform Baptists,⁶⁵ chose 'public protest' instead of 'wise manoeuvring'.⁶⁶ They became involved in underground activities such as the illegal printing of Christian literature. Refusal to register churches became a sign of true faith for them, and faithfulness to God came to be measured by disobedience to state requirements. 'Illegal' believers often considered the 'registered' believers to be traitors, because they were prepared to let their church life be confined by restrictive state regulations.⁶⁷ Michael Bourdeaux has stated that the reformers opposed the AUCECB for its alleged compromises with the state.⁶⁸ Even more – the Reform Baptists felt that their identity as evangelicals was threatened by state demands. In 1966, the reformers' *samizdat* publication *Bratskii Listok* (Brotherly Leaflet) accused the AUCECB of trying to bend God's people to sin (i.e. registration of churches and obedience to the demands of the state), but 'the faithful will continue to serve God in the same way as Mordecai, Daniel and the apostles...'.⁶⁹ The registered believers answered quoting Romans 13:1-2, calling for respect for the government, or 1 Peter 2:13-17, urging Christians to do good and in this way 'silence the ignorant talk of foolish men'. A particular government may be anti-christian, but 'God sets such governments as a judgement over the nations'.⁷⁰ Emphasis on 'decent life', total abstinence from alcohol, honesty at the workplace, willingness to serve in the army, and giving to Caesar's that which was Caesar's (Matthew 22:21) – all this constituted the AUCECB position regarding

⁶⁴ Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour: Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, pp. 98-99.

⁶⁵ From September 1965 they used the name Council of Churches of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists.

⁶⁶ In the 1960s and 1970s a protest movement emerged also in the Russian Orthodox Church. See Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church, A Contemporary History*, pp. 290-447; Michael Bourdeaux, *Patriarch and Prophets: Persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church* (London and Oxford: Mowbrays, 1970).

⁶⁷ Hans Barndenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty*, p. 199.

⁶⁸ Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia: Protestant Opposition to Soviet Religious Policy* (London and New York: Macmillan and St Martin's Press, 1968), pp. 22, 26.

⁶⁹ *Bratskii Listok*, no. 6 (1966). Estonian translation. Materials of Robert Võsu, Archive of the Union of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches of Estonia.

⁷⁰ Hans Barndenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty*, p. 200.

Christian witness in the persecuting state. However, never appearing in print was the alternative choice; the call to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).⁷¹ Fragmentation among believers themselves was inevitable.

The official line of Soviet Evangelicals seems to have overestimated the positive effect of ‘cognitive dissonance’⁷² whereby it was hoped that an exemplary lifestyle displayed by Christians would raise questions in the mindset of their persecutors. Instead of becoming more favourable towards Christians, some atheistic authors became even more convinced that Christianity was dangerous. One author described evangelical attitudes toward labour as ‘a pious fraud, an about-face tactic calculated to regain the respect of fellow citizens’.⁷³ By contrast, the Reform Baptists seemed to have overestimated the effect of radical confrontation. Like some Christians in the Early Church period,⁷⁴ so also the Reform Baptists sometimes provoked the state authorities as if expecting hard measures to be applied. In some cases they refused to use ‘secular’ language, thereby emphasising their claim to exist under spiritual not temporal laws. Some Evangelicals forbade their children to join the Soviet Pioneers’ organisation, or to wear the ‘devil’s sign’, namely the red tie.⁷⁵ Reform Baptists tended to glorify the suffering and conflict that came their way from the atheistic state. They declared that many of their ‘brothers and sisters were elevated by God to His glory by imprisonment and prison camps’.⁷⁶

As a result of pressure from outside, many Christians in the Soviet Union developed something of an ‘identity of the persecuted’. When Communism collapsed, they found difficulty in actively and positively participating in the social and political life of their country. Certainly, there are today new challenges for Christians in the former Soviet Union areas; for example, the emerging Islamic identity in Central Asia has, on several occasions, put severe restrictions on Christians. Nevertheless, the question of how to keep one’s identity but still maintain the ability to dialogue with the wider culture is still a challenge and a theological task for the Christian Church, especially in situations of persecution. Also, maintaining the integrity and atmosphere of trust and avoiding ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ is an ethical challenge to believers under state pressure.

⁷¹ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*, pp. 217-221.

⁷² ‘Cognitive Dissonance’, in *Baker Encyclopaedia of Psychology*, ed. by D Benner (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 188.

⁷³ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*, p. 219.

⁷⁴ Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, p. 505.

⁷⁵ Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants*, p. 191.

⁷⁶ *Bratskii Listok*, no. 6 (1966). Estonian translation. Materials of Robert Võsu, Archive of the Union of Evangelical Christian and Baptist Churches of Estonia.

Conclusion

Christians in persecuting environments have faced not only restrictions but physical and psychological suffering. They have faced the dilemma of belonging to the kingdom of Caesar and to the kingdom of Christ at the same time. Seeking solutions to this dilemma has not taken place in a neutral setting, but it has been influenced by the intensity of the persecution experience. In several cases, in Early Christianity and later in church history, Christians have chosen obedience and respect for the state, even a persecuting state, but refused to admit that the state has the final authority. There have also been attempts to ally the Christian Church to state powers. In the west this arrangement has usually been designated Christendom. However, dissenting groups such as the Waldenses and Anabaptists were severely suppressed over the years. The Waldenses responded to the situation by attempting to keep as low a profile as possible, risking the loss of their identity altogether. Anabaptists ran into confrontation with the Christendom authorities; the persecution experience pushed them towards a conviction that Christians should focus exclusively on the spiritual realm, as the temporal power was, according to them, 'out of the perfection of Christ'. Persecution helped to shape their Christology, ecclesiology and their understanding of suffering.

Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia had to consider in what ways their convictions were, or should be, compatible with the wider cultural, ethnic and religious values. Slavic Evangelicals in Tsarist times often chose conflict instead of adjusting itself to Russian ethnic or Orthodox expectations, with its aim of national unity. Christians during the Soviet times had to solve questions about their relationship with a state that was determined to stamp out Christianity altogether. Soviet Evangelicals offered two approaches. The official churches preferred outward conformity and emphasised exemplary lifestyle, believing that in this way they were following the same tradition as St Paul. The underground Evangelicals, like the Reform Baptists, chose not to obey restrictive laws and regulations, or even to register their existence with the state, using their international networks to criticise the restriction of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. Following a pattern established by some early Christians prior to the Constantinian reform, and later the Anabaptists, many Soviet Evangelicals developed a cautious attitude in their relationship with the state and wider society, which has partly continued even after the ending of atheistic state dominance. However, some of the dilemmas which had to be faced within the Soviet Union (such as how far to cooperate with the

persecuting state; how to maintain an atmosphere of trust, personal honesty and integrity; to what extent one should reject or embrace compromise), are also characteristic of persecuted Christians in other historical and geographical settings.

Epilogue

This article began with a personal note. With a personal note it should also end. Did I go to the interview? Yes, I met with two KGB officers, who, drinking wine from their *stokans* (tea-glasses), interrogated me for an hour or so. I tried to talk as little as possible, or to say things which I thought would be generally known information. As the interrogation proceeded, the officers began to express their dissatisfaction with loud voices and verbal intimidations. They made it clear to me that I would never be allowed to go abroad and that I had better abandon all hopes of studying theology. With this ‘anti-prophecy’ I was sent away. However, after some years the political and religious situation changed. The predictions of the KGB officers did not come true. I did study theology and, in 1989, made my first trip abroad. KGB structures were dissolved in Estonia.

My personal experience, however, though much less dramatic than the experiences of many other Christians in oppressive contexts, serves two ends as a framework for this essay. Firstly, it shows the author’s motivation to explore the wider story of the experience of Christian faith, practice and persecution. Secondly, it hopefully serves as a reminder for Christians who come from a persecution experience, that for a better understanding of our identity as a fellowship of believers, the complex story (that includes wise and unwise compromises, heroism and weakness) needs to be analysed and remembered both with thankfulness and repentance. Otherwise we will be trapped in our past.

(A version of this article has appeared in *Theological Reflections: Euro-Asian Theological Journal*, No. 6 (2006), pp. 146-61.)

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Did the first Hungarian Baptist become the first Hungarian Adventist?

Johann Rottmayer and the Practice of Free Church Missions in Nineteenth Century Central Europe

Johann Rottmayer is generally esteemed by Hungarian Baptists as being the first Hungarian Baptist, and a true pioneer of the Baptist faith in his homeland. Converted under the ministry of Johann Gerhard Oncken while in Hamburg, Rottmayer and a few other ethnic Germans from Hungary were sent back to Austria and Hungary in 1846. Rottmayer was to work with the Scottish Mission to the Jews in his native Budapest as a colporteur distributing the Scriptures and Christian tracts. Other colleagues worked in Vienna and Pécs. In this manner Oncken hoped to spread the Baptist message to Austria and Hungary. The crushing of the Hungarian revolutionary drive for independence from Habsburg rule in 1849 put an effective end to the budding work. Rottmayer was the sole Baptist to continue to quietly work in Hungary during the dark decades that followed. His work was rewarded with a few baptisms in the 1860s, but economic hardship forced him to leave Budapest just before the Compromise of 1867 – which created the dualist state of Austria-Hungary – would have given him the freedom to work more openly. In 1866 he left Budapest for Kolozsvár, the administrative centre of Transylvania, where he served as the Depositary of the newly established Depot of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). Circumstance dictated that the German Baptist Heinrich Meyer, who moved to Budapest in 1871 (also to work for the BFBS), became the man to establish the first sustained Baptist mission in Hungary, and thus is esteemed as the ‘Father’ of Hungarian Baptists. Nevertheless, Rottmayer is credited by Hungarian Baptists with establishing the Baptist congregation in Kolozsvár and for paving the way for Baptist work in the region through his work with the Bible Society.

This last question of Johann Rottmayer’s involvement in the Baptist life of Kolozsvár during his final years has become a thorny issue because it is the contention of the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) of Hungary that Rottmayer ended his life as an Adventist. This view has been promoted among Hungarian Adventists by the church historian Jenő Szigeti,¹ and

¹ Szigeti and a colleague, János Pechtol, opened this debate in a response to Jenő Bányai’s 1966 article in *Theologiai Szemle* examining the work of Rottmayer and Novák in Transylvania and the Alföld. Published shortly afterwards, and borrowing its title from Bányai’s, the article was entitled simply *Notes on the article ‘The beginning period of the Baptist mission in Transylvania and the Great Plains’*. The aim of the article was to correct an impression that Bányai left that Rottmayer ended his life as a Baptist,

taken up in the West by the Adventist historian Daniel Heinz². This view has been vociferously denied by Hungarian Baptists, particularly Jenő Bányai (Bányai, 'Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire'), who have had no voice in the West. This is a shame because a preponderance of the evidence supports the Baptist claim that Rottmayer remained faithful to his Baptist convictions. With the advantage of Adventist materials not available to Hungarian Baptist historians, a more nuanced defence of Rottmayer's denominational faithfulness will be given. While my argument will deprive the Hungarian Adventists of their father, I will not leave them as orphans. On the contrary, I will argue that they should at last embrace their true mother, for so long left in the shadows as the Hungarian Adventists sought to deprive Baptists of their patrimony.

The origin of this controversy begins with the arrival in Kolozsvár of Ludwig Richard Conradi. A German immigrant from southern Russia to America, he was converted to the SDA in America. After mission work among the German immigrants in the mid-west, he was sent by the SDA to undertake mission work in Europe, where he spread the Adventist message in Switzerland, southern Russia, Germany, and in the Netherlands.³ After a brief sabbatical in America, Conradi returned to Europe where he sought to

arguing that in fact Rottmayer had become an Adventist in the last years of his life. This article in turn invited a response from Bányai arguing that Rottmayer was constrained to live as an Adventist because of his wife, but never became an Adventist by conviction. This ended the back and forth exchange between the two sides, but not Szigeti's interest in this subject. He returned to this theme in an article originally published in *Theologiai Szemle* in 1970 on the subject of how *Steps to Christ*, the most well-known evangelistic book by the founder of the SDA movement, Ellen G White, came to be translated into Hungarian. Entitled '*Steps to Christ* in Hungary', the article appeared in a revised version in Szigeti's 1981 compilation of articles on various aspects of the history of the Free Church movements in Hungary, which borrowed its title from Deuteronomy 8:2, '*And remember the long way...*'. The significant factor in the revision was that Szigeti had, in the intervening period, been invited to America to undertake research at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. There he was able to examine early Adventist literature in the Adventist Heritage Center of the James White Library. As a result he briefly refined his earlier argument concerning Rottmayer's delayed conversion.

² Heinz discusses Rottmayer's supposed conversion to Adventism in two monographs that appeared in the series 'Archives of International Adventist History'. The first was *Ludwig Richard Conradi: Missionar der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Europa*, a biography of the missionary who is credited with converting the Rottmayer family. The second was *Church, State, and Religious Dissent: A History of Seventh-day Adventists in Austria, 1890-1975*. In both monographs Heinz, despite his citation of sources that prove otherwise, merely parrots Conradi's later idealised recollection of how he converted the Rottmayer family. Moreover, while the debate between Szigeti and Bányai is cited in the footnotes (in untranslated form), Heinz makes no effort to point out that Rottmayer's conversion is a debated matter among the SDA and Baptist denominations in Hungary. Thus scholars in the West who have no means of reading the relevant Hungarian language materials are left, on the basis of Heinz's work, with the mistaken impression that Rottmayer's conversion to Adventism is an established fact.

³ Daniel Heinz, *Ludwig Richard Conradi: Missionar der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Europa*, 2., veränderte Auflage. Archiv Für Internationale Adventgeschichte [Band 2] (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1987) pp. 35–45.

establish a German mission centered in Hamburg as the strategic starting point for a wider outreach to central Europe.⁴

In 1890 Conradi began to do research to supplement the church historical overview of the continued observance of the sabbath as found in John N. Andrews *History of the Sabbath*. During the course of his research he learned of the Unitarian Sabbatarians of Transylvania, who arose during the chaotic opening period of the Reformation in Hungary. Although this movement was later suppressed under the Habsburgs, Conradi determined to go to Kolozsvár to research the matter further. This was a fateful decision, according to Heinz. In his view, the ‘cradle of Adventism in Austria-Hungary is Transylvania’.⁵

When he arrived in Kolozsvár, Conradi was aided in his research by Dr János Kovács, leader of the Unitarian theological seminary and a professor of church history who had studied the Unitarian sabbatarians. It was Kovács who introduced Conradi to Rottmayer. Heinz cites at length Conradi’s later recollection of the events, which appeared in the May, 1922, issue of the *Review and Herald* (the full title of the magazine was *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, but was commonly known as the *Review and Herald*; I will use the abbreviation RH for the magazine). The article was entitled ‘Divine Providences in the European Division’, and the account is as follows:

Hearing that I lived in Hamburg, he invited me to visit a German-Hungarian friend of his, J. Rottmayer by name, who was in charge of the Bible depositary, and who as the first Baptist in Hungary had been baptized by Oncken from Hamburg. After introducing me, he said a few words in Hungarian, and I noticed how the aged gentleman looked at me full of pity. The Baptist brother invited me to dine with him the next day, and I accepted his invitation. As we began to talk about the Scriptures and I pointed him to some of the glorious truths concerning the sanctuary on high, his eyes lighted up, and he said, ‘The professor told me yesterday that you had come all the way from Hamburg to become a Unitarian, and in pity I invited you here to warn you. But the Lord in His mercy has turned the tables on the Unitarian professor, and made him unwillingly the agent to bring the full light of present truth to my home’.⁶

⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

⁵ Daniel Heinz, ‘Church, Sect, and Governmental Control: Seventh-Day Adventists in the Habsburg Monarchy’, *East European Quarterly*, 23.1 (Mar 1989), p. 111.

⁶ Daniel Heinz, *Church, State, and Religious Dissent: A History of Seventh-Day Adventists in Austria, 1890–1975*. Archiv Für Internationale Adventgeschichte [Band 5] (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 64-65.

Heinz cites the same narrative from the 15 June 1922 issue of the *Adventbote* in his biography of Conradi.⁷ In both accounts Rottmayer and his wife are said to have become immediate adherents of the Adventist message.

Szigeti and Pechtol also cite this account from Conradi, but as it appeared in the Hungarian Adventist magazine, the *Evangéliumi Munkás* [*Evangelical Worker*], also in 1922: ‘In the end the result was that he and his wife [Magdolna] together accepted the truth. He said with tears in his eyes that indeed the professor was an instrument in him coming to know the whole truth. Later the daughter too followed her parents example.’⁸ Szigeti and Pechtol attempted to soften the narrative given by Conradi, which places Rottmayer’s conversion at their first meeting in 1890, by interjecting before this conclusion the observation that ‘[p]robably more visits and conversations followed this interesting introduction’ at Rottmayer’s house, that is, before Rottmayer accepted the ‘whole truth’.⁹ However, Bányai makes the interesting observation that each time this narrative was retold in a Hungarian Adventist publication, the opposite point of Szigeti and Pechtol was reinforced. Thus in a 1936 issue of the *Advent Hírnök* [*Advent Messenger*], the narrative is as follows:

The Rottmayer family invited brother Conradi to come join them one evening, calculating that perhaps they could succeed in converting him to the Baptist faith... After a short conversation they were convinced that according to the ten commandments one must observe the sabbath. They were also convinced of the Adventist message, and they accepted the truth on the spot. In this manner the first Adventist in Hungary was made out of the first Baptist in Transylvania. His family also accepted the Adventist truth.¹⁰

Likewise, a 1948 issue of the *Idők Jelei* [*Witness of the Times*] concluded that ‘[t]he first visit was enough for them to accept the sabbath truth as well as the Adventist message’, although it was confessed that ‘[w]e do not know very much about the preparations for baptism of Johann Rottmayer and his wife, however it is probable that more visits took place until in 1892 brother Conradi performed the holy rite of baptism upon them’.¹¹

⁷ Heinz, *Ludwig Richard Conradi: Missionar der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Europa*, p. 51.

⁸ János Pechtol and Jenő Szigeti. “Megjegyzések ‘Az erdélyi és alföldi Baptista misszió kezdeti korszakai’ című cikkhez.” *Theologiai Szemle* 9, new series, 3–4 (1966), p.100.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁰ Jenő Bányai, ‘Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire’, *Theologiai Szemle* 9, new series, 7–8 (1966), p. 230.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.230.

In their effort to soften the implausible witness of these Adventist magazines, Szigeti and Pechtol explained that Rottmayer first became an Adventist in 1892, but that he was not rebaptized, as the SDA recognised the baptism of the Baptist denomination.¹² Szigeti and Pechtol take this date of 1892 from Conradi's replacement in the Hungarian mission, J.F. Huenergardt, who in his 'remembrances and official writings' always accounted Rottmayer as an SDA congregant since 1892, when he was converted under Conradi.¹³ This perhaps accounts for the speculation in the *Idők Jelei* that Rottmayer was baptized in 1892. Following his research in the Adventist Heritage Center, Szigeti places Rottmayer's joining of the SDA church at 22 May 1895; this is the date of the founding of the first SDA congregation in Hungary, which took place in Kolozsvár, with Conradi presiding at the service.¹⁴ While this may be the formal date of Rottmayer's supposed switch to the SDA church, I shall give evidence that Conradi places Rottmayer's switch prior to the founding of the Kolozsvár congregation, yet not as early as Huenergardt believed.

In any case, despite Szigeti's effort to mitigate the impact of the misunderstandings, contradictions and implausibilities of the Adventist literature concerning Rottmayer's switch to the SDA denomination,¹⁵ it must be confessed that at the origin of this problem is Conradi's own later idealised revision of the events surrounding Rottmayer's joining of the SDA. The later witness of Hungarian Adventist literature only adds hagiographic colour and speculation to Conradi's idealised recollection. But before we examine the discrepancy between Conradi's early and later testimony concerning the Rottmayers, the narrative must be completed.

¹² Pechtol and Szigeti. "Megjegyzések 'Az erdélyi és alföldi Baptista misszió kezdeti korszakai' című cikkhez.", p. 100.

¹³ Ibid., p.100.

¹⁴ Jenő Szigeti, 'A 'Jézushoz vezető út' Magyarországon'. 'És emlékezzél meg as útról..' (Budapest: Szabadegyházak Tanácsa, 1981), p. 133.

¹⁵ Apart from the discrepancy between Conradi's and Huenergardt's later recollections as to when Rottmayer converted, there are a few other misunderstandings and mistakes that appear in the different narratives. There was confusion in the Adventist literature about Rottmayer's residences in Kolozsvár, mirrored also by Heinz in his biography of Conradi. Moreover, there was confusion as to when Rottmayer moved to Kolozsvár and how long he was in the service of the Bible Society. The *Advent Hírnök* and the *Idők Jelei* date both of these from 1846, instead of 1866! Finally, Rottmayer's evangelistic efforts for the SDA take on miraculous proportions. The conversion of the Kolozsvár Baptist István Enyedi Szabo is attributed to Rottmayer, when in fact Szabo converted after Rottmayer's death! Bányai expended much effort in pointing out both real and imagined mistakes in the Adventist literature (mistakenly arguing, for example, that Rottmayer worked for the National Bible Society of Scotland and not the BFBS), even given the corrections made by Szigeti and Pechtol. The aim was to underline the unreliability of later Adventist testimony concerning Rottmayer.

There is no doubt at all that Magdolna Rottmayer became an Adventist. The Adventist testimony is also that other family members also became Adventist, and in particular Maria Rottmayer, Johann's daughter from his first wife, is mentioned in this regard. This claim is supported by the fact that Maria Rottmayer worked for some time in the *Internationale Traktatgesellschaft* in Hamburg, the SDA literature mission centre for Europe, where she carried on correspondence with inquirers and translated tracts into Hungarian. However, it is also true that by 1896 Maria Rottmayer was living in Budapest, a member of a Baptist church, and the second wife of Attila Csopják, one of the triumvirate of leaders in the independent Magyar Baptist mission that sought to liberate the Magyar mission within the Hungarian Baptist movement from the patriarchal control of the German Meyer.¹⁶ Bányai observed that because of the 'unbearable temper' of Magdolna Rottmayer, all of Rottmayer's children 'fled from their parent's Kolozsvár home. Thus it is not possible to talk of the conversion of the family for the simple reason that the children were not at home.'¹⁷ He suggests that Maria Rottmayer went to Hamburg in order to escape from home, and not simply out of Adventist convictions; the fact that she subsequently married Csopják bears this supposition out. In truth, what Bányai presents as an either/or is actually a both/and. More of this shortly.¹⁸

The final piece of the narrative concerns the arrival of J.F. Huenergardt in Kolozsvár. Johann F. Huenergardt was born in 1875 in the Volga-German settlement of Wiesenmüller in southern Russia, and emigrated with his parents to America. He was converted under the preaching of Conradi, and after theological studies in America he was sent to Europe as a missionary in 1897. He spent one year in Hamburg until he was made the superintendent of the Adventist mission in Hungary and the Balkans, a position he held until 1918.¹⁹ On his way down to Kolozsvár he stopped in Vienna to visit with Johann Rottmayer Jr. and family. Of his arrival in Kolozsvár Huenergardt wrote, 'When I arrived in Kolozsvár in August of 1898, there were already four Adventists: Johann Rottmayer,

¹⁶ The other two were András Udvarnoki and Lajos Balogh, the two 'peasant boys' sent by Heinrich Meyer to Hamburg for theological training at the Baptist seminary. Csopják was unique among the early Baptist leadership in that although he came from a modest background, he succeeded in rising up the ranks of the civil service in the Ministry of Finance. As a result, he enjoyed the distinction among the early Baptists of belonging to the *úri középosztály*, the 'gentlemanly middle class'.

¹⁷ Bányai, 'Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire', p. 231.

¹⁸ Within a few years of Rottmayer's move to Kolozsvár, his eldest son was working with the BFBS in Vienna and was involved in Baptist ministry. His other two sons, Wilhelm and Rudolf, emigrated to America. Maria was periodically sent to Vienna to live with family because the situation in her parents' home was too difficult.

¹⁹ Heinz, *Church, State and Religious Dissent*, p. 69.

Mrs Rottmayer, Mária Babos, and János Kovács of Vista’.²⁰ This was a small basis upon which to build a work, especially since János Kovács died shortly after Huenergardt arrived. It also belies the notion that Rottmayer had been an effective evangelist of the Adventist message. There were other Adventist converts among the Transylvanian Saxons, but these were not close to Kolozsvár. Huenergardt established a small fellowship which met in Rottmayer’s house. In this sense Johann Rottmayer’s open and *ongoing* involvement with the Adventist mission in Hungary can be dated from this point. The question becomes whether this involvement was a willing and free one.

To determine this, one must go back and examine the narrative from the perspective of contemporary reporting in the RH, rather than from Conradi’s later remembrances. Then this narrative must be subjected to the Baptist arguments which dispute Rottmayer’s alleged switch of allegiance from the Baptist to the SDA denomination. What emerges is a picture of a man in the midst of a battle.

The first mention of the Rottmayers by Conradi warranted merely a few lines in a long article detailing his travels and research in Transylvania. After describing the help he had received from Dr Kovács, Conradi added, ‘But besides all this, I was introduced to a family of Baptists, who have the charge of the Bible depositary there. I had several Bible readings with them, and they both, with tears in their eyes, thanked God for the light they received, and invited me to stop with them the next time instead of going to a hotel’.²¹ Besides this, Conradi made passing reference to Rottmayer’s ‘Sunday-school’ and the difficulties he encountered from a Protestant minister who opposed the work; ‘A little Hungarian boy came while I was there, and told him with tears in his eyes that he was not allowed to come any more. Thus we see intolerance even up to the present day’.²² From this description it is clear that while Conradi’s presentation of the Adventist message made a distinct impression upon the family, neither Rottmayer nor his wife was represented as having converted.²³

²⁰ Pechtol and Szigeti. “Megjegyzések ‘Az erdélyi és alföldi Baptista misszió kezdeti korszakai’ című cikkhez.”, p. 100.

²¹ Ludwig Richard Conradi, ‘A Visit to Austria’ Pt. 1. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 67.25 (Tuesday, June 24 1890), p. 395.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 395.

²³ Conradi gave a similar account in 1892 that confirms that there were no immediate conversions. ‘But while inquiring of a college professor about these people, he told me, when he heard that I resided in Hamburg, of an old gentleman who was in the charge of the Bible depositary there, and who had been converted in Hamburg, and had joined the Baptists. We went there together, and as I found that the man had a real Christian experience, which this professor lacked, I did not enter into any conversation about the light the Lord has given us, but called on him alone in the evening. We had such a blessed reading together, his wife and daughter also attending, that they pressed me to come the next day; and when I had

The quandary faced by Rottmayer was revealed by a letter from Maria Rottmayer to Conradi shortly after his visit. It also revealed the growing split in the family:

Since you have come by the grace of God into our house, and have presented to us in such a forcible manner the claims of the law of the Lord; we have thought much about it and investigated... We are now in a condition which cannot last. My father, a Baptist since many years ago, acknowledges the correctness of these truths, but how shall he make a change now? The mother is more zealous in obeying, and now we observe neither Sabbath nor Sunday as it should be. There is danger that we get into a state of uncertainty which cannot serve our peace.²⁴

By this point in his life, Johann Rottmayer had been a Baptist for nearly fifty years, and had suffered much hardship for his religious convictions. Is it any wonder that whatever impression Conradi's theological argumentation may have had upon Rottmayer, he could not bring himself to abandon his Baptist identity? On the other hand, Conradi evidently did not encounter the same obstacle with Magdolna Rottmayer. Yet she had only been a Baptist since 1865 – 25 years. Why the difference?

The difference is that Magdolna Rottmayer's standing and history within the Baptist movement in Hungary was far different from her husband's. In 1878 she had been disfellowshipped by Heinrich Meyer from the Baptist Church in Budapest, of which the Rottmayers were charter members, and apparently neither Magdolna Rottmayer or Meyer made any sustained effort to seek reconciliation leading to her formal readmittance into fellowship. Thus whatever merits Conradi's arguments may have had with Magdolna Rottmayer on an intellectual and theological level, it must be admitted that given her bitterness towards Meyer, and perhaps the broader Baptist community, she was emotionally predisposed to seek affiliation with another Free Church mission that would enthusiastically accept her as a convert. No doubt she would also seek to bring her husband and other family members out from the Baptist orbit into the Adventist community in which she found acceptance to erase the stigma of her disfellowshipment and to seek further validation as an Adventist. As shall

departed that night, I had a hearty invitation to stop with them whenever I should visit Hungary again. In the course of our correspondence, mother and daughter became fully convinced, and have since joined the church.' (Conradi, 'The German Mission Field', *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 69.49 (13 Dec 1892), p. 773). In fact it is clear that of all the family members, it was specifically Johann Rottmayer that did not quickly join the SDA denomination after a period of 'correspondence' between Conradi and the family.

²⁴ L R Conradi, 'The Work in Central Europe', *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 67.27 (Tuesday, July 8 1890): p. 426.

be demonstrated, we can also surmise from what we know of her character that she would not limit herself to moral suasion in this effort.

The Adventist literature is at pains to present Johann Rottmayer – the ‘first Baptist in Hungary’ – as the father of Hungarian Adventism. But Hungarian Adventism does not have an indigenous father (Conradi or Huenergardt are more deserving of such a designation). However, it does have a mother. That mother is Magdolna Rottmayer. Conradi stated as much in 1891:

The object of my late visit to Transylvania was to learn some more historical facts about the ancient Sabbath-keepers there, but by the providence of God my feet were led to a family of sincere people, and as the result of a few Bible readings, not only the mother and daughter embraced the truth, but several more are convinced, and others are loudly calling for our publications in the Hungarian. The daughter is now engaged in the work, and the mother has joined our church in Hamburg, and returned as the first Seventh-day Adventist member in that empire.²⁵

What an irony that Magdolna Rottmayer went up to Hamburg in order to join herself to the SDA church, where her husband was converted and baptised by Oncken nearly fifty years previously, and from where he was sent back to Hungary by Oncken to begin the first attempt at a Baptist mission in that country, and from Hamburg she returned to Kolozsvár ‘as the first Seventh-day Adventist member’ in Hungary, according to the above quote from Conradi. It is also odd that this foundational role would be denied to Magdolna Rottmayer in Hungary, given the fact that Ellen G. White is the mother of the SDA denomination.

Travelling with Magdolna Rottmayer to Hamburg was her step-daughter Maria Rottmayer, who stayed in the city to work in the *Internationale Traktatgesellschaft*. In fact, this journey was made with Conradi. He wrote of Maria Rottmayer, ‘When I visited this place again in November, 1890, I had several readings, about forty attending, mostly Hungarians... After my visit, this young sister went to Hamburg with me, and has since got out quite a number of publications in the Hungarian language, and is sending them all over the country.’²⁶ She was apparently encouraged by Conradi to attend a mission school that the SDA would open

²⁵ Conradi, ‘The Demands of the German and Russian Mission Fields’, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 68.50 (22 Dec 1891), p. 790.

²⁶ Conradi, ‘The German Mission Field’, p. 773.

in Hamburg, and in which he would be one of the teachers.²⁷ H.P. Holser, an SDA missionary working in Europe, wrote of the opening of the school on January 9, 1891, and mentioned that twenty-five students were in attendance, including ‘one from Hungary’.²⁸ It is probable that her studies occupied only a small portion of her stay in Hamburg. What made Maria unique among those in the Hamburg Adventist mission was her Hungarian language ability. Looking back in 1894 to his 1890 visit, Conradi explained that ‘two German sisters embraced the truth at Klausenburg ... As one knew the Hungarian language, we began to publish Bible readings in that tongue, and we educated her as secretary for that field.’²⁹ Already in August of 1891, Maria Rottmayer was mentioned as a mission worker ‘doing Bible work and correspondence’.³⁰ In October of 1891 she was described as the ‘Secretary for Hungary and Bohemia’.³¹ It is possible that given the growing split between her father and step-mother, evidenced in her letter cited above, Maria Rottmayer was motivated by more than Adventist convictions in her decision to attend the mission school in Hamburg, and to stay on as a worker in the literature mission. She was also certainly encouraged by her step-mother to follow through on her new convictions. Still these ancillary factors do not detract from the fact that for a certain period from 1890 until an unknown date before her move to Budapest and marriage to Attila Csopják in 1896, Maria Rottmayer considered herself an Adventist.

With Magdolna Rottmayer firmly within the Adventist orbit, and Maria Rottmayer working for the *Internationale Traktatgesellschaft* in Hamburg, this leaves the battle for the heart and mind of Johann Rottmayer to be resolved. This order of events is in direct conflict with the picture painted by Conradi in the *Evangéliumi Munkás*, in which the conversion of the parents preceded that of the daughter. According to Conradi’s testimony in the RH, Rottmayer did not convert until sometime in late 1893 to early 1894. Moreover, while Conradi may have planted the seed, it was a ‘brother Benecke’ who apparently witnessed the harvest.

Last fall we sent out our first laborer, brother Benecke, and after laboring some at Budapest and making a visit at Kronstadt, he

²⁷ It was also noted that Mrs Conradi taught English to those who were interested, and this is likely how Maria Rottmayer learned English, a skill she would later put to use in working with her future husband in the production of Baptist literature.

²⁸ H P Holser, Letter, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 68.7 (17 Feb 1891), p. 108.

²⁹ Conradi, ‘The Hungarian Kingdom’, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 71.17 (24 Apr 1894), p. 266.

³⁰ A O Olsen, Letter, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 68.33 (18 Aug 1891), p. 521.

³¹ Conradi, ‘The Work of the Hamburg Secretaries’, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 68.40 (13 Oct 1891), p. 630.

settled at Klausenburg. When I visited Klausenburg this year, the number of believers had increased to ten. Father Rottmayer, one of the first Baptists in Hungary, had followed his wife and daughter; and the bitter opposition lately manifested by the Baptists by pen and word, only ripened him in his decision, and today he is fully with us. For many years he had charge of the British Bible depository; but now he will devote his time to laboring in private for the spread of the truth.³²

This apparent change of heart must have occurred before March 17, 1894, when Conradi reported holding ‘our first regular Sabbath service’. However, the church was not constituted at this time, despite the interest of the attenders: ‘All desired to unite with us, part of them by baptism; but the illness of father Rottmayer caused us to put it off until my visit next summer, when we hope to have our first church in Hungary.’³³ From Conradi’s contemporary reporting of the progress of the Hungarian mission, it is clear that it took close to three years before he could claim Johann Rottmayer as an Adventist.

This obviously is a different picture than the one Conradi later painted. One also wonders why Huenergardt believed Johann Rottmayer had been joined to the SDA denomination since 1892? After all, he conducted Sabbath services in the Rottmayer’s house after his arrival in Kolozsvár in 1898, affording him ample opportunity to hear Rottmayer’s testimony firsthand. But this is not the only inconsistency between Conradi and Huenergardt.³⁴

Two other facts bear commenting upon. The first concerns the spin Conradi gave to Rottmayer’s retirement from the Bible Society and move to the edge of town. He attributed this turn of events to his Adventist faith. Concerning his visit the following summer to establish the first Adventist congregation in Hungary, Conradi wrote, ‘May 20, the writer reached

³² Conradi, ‘The Hungarian Kingdom’, p. 266.

³³ Ibid., p. 266.

³⁴ For example, in 1895 Conradi claimed four additions, two by baptism, to the Kolozsvár congregation (including an un-named woman he identified as the Rottmayer’s adopted daughter), and reported seven people as belonging to the Kolozsvár congregation in 1896; Conradi concluded of his 1896 visit to Transylvania, ‘Thus we have now thirteen members in Hungary, and enough keeping the Sabbath to raise this soon to twenty’. (Conradi, ‘The Work in Hungary’, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 73.17 (28 Apr 1896) p. 266). The majority of these members appear to have been located in Kolozsvár. Yet when Huenergardt arrived in Kolozsvár in 1898, he noted that there were four Adventists in the city: the Rottmayers, Mária Babos, and János Kovács. There is no mention of the Rottmayer’s adopted daughter (assuming that Mária Babos is not the daughter). There were other believers among the Saxons of Transylvania, but one wonders where all the believers in Kolozsvár went. It leads one to believe that Conradi either overstated the case, or that Huenergardt understated it, or that some converts quickly fell away.

Klausenburg to visit the company there, the meetings being held at the hospitable house of brother Rottmayer, who, after over twenty-five years of faithful labor for the Bible Society, laid down his charge in order to observe the Sabbath, and exchanged his home in the city for a quieter place in the suburbs.³⁵ Rottmayer's retirement was attributed to his old age and increasing infirmity by Edward Millard in the 1895 BFBS *Annual Report*, a much more plausible explanation, given his 75 years of age. One wonders if Rottmayer resigned in order to labour 'for the spread of the truth', why then did he leave his well-established base in the centre of the city 'for a quieter place in the suburbs', thus diminishing his presence among the population? But the move is quite understandable if he retired because of his failing health and to spend his last years engaged in his favourite activity, tending to his orchard and gardening. This view is even confirmed by Conradi, who put off performing baptisms in 1894 until the next year because of Rottmayer's poor health.³⁶

The second point that stands out is the 'bitter opposition' of the Baptists towards Rottmayer's decision to follow his wife and daughter, which 'only ripened him in his decision' to become an Adventist. Again in 1895 Conradi wrote of the process that brought the family into the Adventist fold, 'After my visit at their house, the truth gradually took hold of the family, though no pains were spared on the part of the leading Baptists to prejudice him against us.'³⁷ If no effort was spared, then why did the Baptists of Hungary continue to consider Rottmayer a fellow Baptist after his decision, in Conradi's words, to be 'fully with us', a decision, in fact, which led him to resign from the BFBS in order to 'spread the truth' as proclaimed by the SDA? If the 'bitter opposition' of the Baptists cemented this decision for Rottmayer, then why was there no open break on the part of the Baptists with Rottmayer?

On May 22, 1895, a baptismal service was held by Conradi, which marked the founding of the first SDA congregation in Hungary. Conradi wrote:

³⁵ Conradi, 'Our First Baptism in Hungary', *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 72.28 (9 July 1895), p. 441.

³⁶ In fact Rottmayer's old age is a recurring theme in Conradi's reports. When he visited the Rottmayers for four days in March 1896 to perform a baptismal service, he wrote, 'Brother Rottmayer is doing what he can, in his old age, to make known the word of truth.' (Conradi, 'The Work in Hungary', p. 265). It does not appear at all that Rottmayer was an active SDA evangelist. On the contrary, it sounds very much like Rottmayer continued his involvement in the distribution of evangelistic literature as he was able. But this did not necessarily constitute a particularly Adventist activity. After all, even the Reformed minister József Szalay published Adventist literature in his evangelical magazine *Keresztyén [Christian]*.

³⁷ Conradi, 'Our First Baptism in Hungary', p. 441.

After a heavy thunderstorm, while flashes of lightning occasionally lighted up our path, we repaired to a creek, and there baptized a Hungarian brother and the adopted daughter of brother Rottmayer. Next day was a holiday, and some twenty-five strangers attended our meetings forenoon and afternoon; and in the evening, before celebrating the ordinances, the granddaughter of brother Rottmayer, who is a member of the Baptist Church in Vienna, arose and asked for admission. Thus old age and youth, Hungarian and German, all became united by the sweet influence of the Spirit of God, which was felt to a large degree at our first ordinance meeting in Hungary.³⁸

At this time an otherwise unknown adopted daughter of the Rottmayer's and their granddaughter, the daughter of Johann Rottmayer Jr., were joined to the SDA fellowship. Moreover, with the allusion to 'old age and youth' becoming 'united', Conradi was likely referring to Johann Rottmayer and his granddaughter being joined together in the new congregation he had established at 'our first ordinance meeting' in Kolozsvár.³⁹ This would certainly qualify as a rather public switch of denominational affiliation. Moreover, after Huenergardt arrived in 1898, it was well known among Rottmayer's Baptist friends that he attended the Sabbath service held in his house. How then is it possible that Rottmayer's fellow Baptists did not consider him to have left their fellowship? Was it merely wilful suspension of belief?

When Szigeti and Pechtol entered into debate with Bányai about Rottmayer's denominational faithfulness, it was thought that Conradi visited Kolozsvár for the last time in 1892. Then six years later Huenergardt arrived in 1898. This former date should be pushed back at least to March of 1896, leaving at most a gap of two years. Yet even with the new information brought to the debate here, the general outline of Bányai's argument still holds. His point was that if in the intervening period it could be shown that Rottmayer maintained his Baptist involvement, if there was convincing testimony to his continued Baptist self-identity, then this would cast doubt on the appearance of his purported switch in denominational affiliation.

In the same year Conradi first came to Kolozsvár, Rottmayer invited Mihály Kornya, the most famous of the Hungarian 'peasant prophets' and the true hero of the Magyar Baptists, to come help with the growing Magyar Baptist mission. This was due in part to Rottmayer's age, but also

³⁸ Conradi, 'Our First Baptism in Hungary', p. 442.

³⁹ This is likely why Szigeti placed Rottmayer's switch to the SDA at this date.

due to the fact that Rottmayer never believed he was sufficiently fluent in Hungarian to minister well to the Magyar population in the area. The Magyar Baptist congregation in the city was formed in 1891. According to Károly Papp Sr.,⁴⁰ from 1890 on, ‘as often as [Kornya] came to Kolozsvár, he did not miss the opportunity to seek out brother Rottmayer’.⁴¹ This would be expected if Rottmayer was held in esteem by Kornya as a Baptist pioneer. But these visits would have ceased, or at least significantly decreased in regularity, if Rottmayer had become a committed Adventist.

Of particular merit are the arguments surrounding the involvement of Rottmayer and his son with the incipient independent Magyar Baptist mission during this period. At the centre stands a letter from Rottmayer to András Szabó, who was a driving force in the emergence of the Magyar-oriented mission which declared its independence from Heinrich Meyer. Written on the stationery of the National Bible Society of Scotland,⁴² and sent from Kolozsvár on January 29, 1894, it is clear that Rottmayer and his son are sympathetic to the plans of Szabó and the others at the forefront of the growing split. The date of the letter is highly significant, because it was written by Rottmayer around the very time Conradi claimed that Rottmayer had decided to follow ‘his wife and daughter; and the bitter opposition lately manifested by the Baptists by pen and word, only ripened him in his decision’ to join himself to the Adventist mission! If this was the case, then why did this group look to Rottmayer for support? Why did they ask him to come to Budapest to help them? This letter was also written shortly before Rottmayer retired, and it puts to rest Conradi’s claim that Rottmayer retired to observe the Sabbath and spread the Adventist message. Rottmayer understandably wrote that he was not able to physically do what they asked, but he suggested they contact his son in Vienna because ‘he knows Hungarian better and he is still young and stronger than his father.’⁴³ He also wrote, ‘What can I do in this matter? I can pray and give a little money....’⁴⁴ The picture that emerges is hardly one of a convert to Adventism, but rather of a Baptist elder statesman still involved in the most pressing affairs of his denomination.

⁴⁰ Károly Papp Sr. was a still living witness at the time of the exchange between Bányai and Szigeti in 1966. He arrived in Kolozsvár in 1895 and eventually became the pastor of the church there. As such he provided an important link to the past.

⁴¹ Bányai, ‘Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseir’, p. 231.

⁴² Perhaps this letter confirmed to Bányai that Rottmayer worked for the NBSS instead of the BFBS. In fact it only confirms that the NBSS used the BFBS depositary there for its own colporteurs.

⁴³ J Rottmayer, Letter, ‘*Krisztusért járva követségben*’: *Tanulmányok a magyar baptista misszió 150 éves történetéből*. Ed. Lajos Bereczki (Budapest: Baptista Kiadó, 1996), p. 499.

⁴⁴ Bányai, ‘Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire’, p. 232.

This exchange leads to the related issue of Meyer's *Mitglieder-Register* (the register of church members maintained by Meyer) and Rottmayer's status within it. In his letter to Szabó, Rottmayer expressed the hope that 'brother Meyer would also recognise that the time has come for the Hungarians to establish their own separate congregation in this large city, where it should have happened a long time ago'.⁴⁵ In short, Rottmayer took a position that Meyer found troublesome and in contradiction with his own views. The relevance of the *Mitglieder Register* in this matter is simple. Johann Rottmayer occupies the first position in the register, Meyer the second place, and Mrs Rottmayer the third place. It is known that Meyer wrote under the entry for Mrs Rottmayer, 'Expelled on October 10th, 1877', following his disastrous visit in which she kicked Meyer out of the house. Despite their later personal reconciliation, she was never readmitted to the fellowship. Bányai argued that Rottmayer would have been similarly stricken from the membership role by Meyer if he believed that Rottmayer had converted, especially given that Rottmayer had provided encouragement and support to the independent Magyar Baptist mission.⁴⁶ Szigeti and Pechtol argued the register furnishes no proof to the question of Rottmayer's conversion, because the register was filled by 1890, and Rottmayer converted after that date.⁴⁷ This represents a misunderstanding of the issue, because even after 1890 brief notes were written in the register to indicate changes in the physical or spiritual conditions of those contained within it.⁴⁸ The fact that Rottmayer was never stricken from the roll indicates at the very least that Meyer never believed that Rottmayer had become an Adventist.

Pechtol and Szigeti sought to blunt this line of argumentation by appealing to Bányai's own description of Rottmayer as one who displayed an 'ecumenical attitude'. This attitude is at the root of ongoing doubts as to Rottmayer's Adventist faith. I would qualify this description, for while Rottmayer could maintain cordial relations with someone like the Unitarian Dr Kovács, his evangelical understanding of the gospel took priority over all else. Hence Rottmayer possessed an evangelical ecumenism, that is, it was more important that one had a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ than if one was a Baptist, Reformed, a Nazarene or Adventist. Thus when Rottmayer wrote to Szabó, he enclosed some tracts 'which my daughter translated into Hungarian', because the evangelical content was more

⁴⁵ Rottmayer, Letter, p. 499.

⁴⁶ Bányai, 'Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire', p. 232.

⁴⁷ Pechtol, et al., 'Megjegyzések 'Az erdélyi és alföldi Baptista misszió kezdeti korszakai' című cikkhez', p. 100.

⁴⁸ Bányai, 'Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire', p. 232.

important than the Adventist provenance of the tracts.⁴⁹ Prior to this we read in an 1892 issue of the RH that the ‘father of our Hungarian secretary, being anxious to see some workers educated in the Hungarian tongue, sent to us a young man who was a Baptist. When he came here and learned about the Sabbath and the immortality question, he went at once to the Baptist minister, who blackened us so terribly that the young man left shortly afterward.’⁵⁰ Conradi mentions the incident because the young man emigrated to America, from where he wrote to say he had become an Adventist. This took place a few years before Conradi claimed Rottmayer had committed himself to the Adventist message. It therefore demonstrates that training workers for the purpose of evangelism was more important to Rottmayer than denominational distinctives; the chance that the young Baptist might switch denominations was one Rottmayer was willing to take.⁵¹ The question then becomes what is the significance of Rottmayer’s evangelical ecumenism? How does it bear upon the question of Rottmayer’s denominational faithfulness?

It goes to the issue of whether Rottmayer would reject one denomination to follow another. The significance of Rottmayer’s ‘ecumenical attitude’ for Szigeti and Pechtol is that ‘Rottmayer’s joining of the Adventist Church was not an open break with the Baptist Church.’⁵² This assertion Bányai disputes, insisting that Rottmayer’s own personal integrity would have demanded an open confession of his new denominational affiliation.⁵³ Moreover, Conradi’s description of Rottmayer’s conversion presupposes an effort on the part of the Baptists to dissuade Rottmayer from such a step, but to no avail. It is therefore difficult indeed to reconcile the contention of Szigeti and Pechtol with the narrative given by Conradi. How then does one reconcile the fact that the Baptists

⁴⁹ Rottmayer, Letter, p. 499. This attitude was not unique to Rottmayer. Szigeti’s article on the translation of Ellen G White’s book, *Steps to Christ*, into Hungarian explores the evangelical relationships between people such as Rottmayer and the Reformed minister, József Szalay, publisher of the evangelical magazine *Keresztény [Christian]* and founder of the ‘First Hungarian Mission Society’. Szalay also published some of these tracts in his magazine and translated *Steps to Christ* into Hungarian (Szigeti, ‘A Jézushoz vezető út’ Magyarország’, p. 134).

⁵⁰ Conradi, ‘Report of the Hamburg Mission Secretaries’, p. 310.

⁵¹ Thus we can surmise that if Rottmayer knew the fate of this young man, he was likely more disappointed that the young man did not return to Hungary to do evangelistic work than he was at his change of his denominational affiliation.

⁵² They further note that Rottmayer ‘maintained good relationships with both his Reformed and Baptist friends. Therefore it is not a reason [to doubt his conversion] that he attended the Reformed Church, especially when one takes into consideration that before Huenergardt ... there was no Adventist pastor in Hungary.’ (Pechtol, et al. p. 100). Bányai counters with the interesting observation that on the contrary, by attending Sunday worship at the Reformed Church Rottmayer was ‘striving to disclose his resistance towards his bullying wife’. (Bányai, ‘Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire’, p. 232). He later adds that the distance to the Baptist meeting place from his new home may have also played a role.

⁵³ Bányai, ‘Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire’, p. 232.

never considered Rottmayer to have changed denominational affiliation with the Adventist claim that Rottmayer had joined them? And why would Rottmayer feel constrained to appease one or another group?

The answer revolves around the unfortunate situation Rottmayer found himself in at home with his second wife. It is interesting that Rottmayer ‘converted’ around the time that he was constrained to retire from the Bible Society due to his old age and failing health. Is it not much more plausible that Rottmayer felt constrained to appease his ill-tempered and forceful wife and live as an Adventist at home than he would continue to comport himself as a Baptist towards his Baptist friends when in fact he had undergone a change of conviction?

Confirmation of this comes from the testimony of Rottmayer’s son-in-law, Attila Csopják. On November 30, 1896, Csopják married Maria Rottmayer. She was his second wife, his first wife had died the year before leaving a widower and seven children behind.⁵⁴ The wedding took place in the Nap Street Baptist church in which Csopják and Maria Rottmayer were members, with András Udvarnoki presiding over the service (this was the Magyar congregation in the city founded when many of the Hungarians left Heinrich Meyer’s congregation on Wesselényi Street). In the *Békehirnök* (BH) [*Messenger of Peace*] article describing the service, Maria Rottmayer was praised for taking upon herself this heavy responsibility, and was described as ‘a member of our church’ and as a possible helpmate to her husband in his literary ministry,⁵⁵ ‘because she is a literarily trained woman who is also able to speak English’.⁵⁶ No mention is made of how Maria Rottmayer came to possess her literary training; it is evident from the article that Maria Rottmayer was accepted as a Baptist of good standing. The circumstances surrounding her move to Budapest and reentry into Baptist life are unknown. What is beyond all doubt is that Maria Rottmayer Csopják lived her remaining years as a dedicated and well-respected Baptist. Her affiliation with the SDA proved to be of a temporary nature.⁵⁷

For the marriage of his daughter, the 78-year-old Johann Rottmayer was able to make it up to Budapest. A portion of his speech at the wedding was recounted in the BH article, which spoke of his conversion and

⁵⁴ Thus, ironically, Maria followed in the footsteps of her step-mother, who married Johann Rottmayer after his first wife, Maria’s mother, died.

⁵⁵ It must be remembered that the BH was begun by Udvarnoki and Csopják, and Csopják was a frequent contributor to it as well as the author of other tracts and books.

⁵⁶ ‘A mi örömünk’, *Békehirnök* 3.1 (1 Jan 1897), p. 5.

⁵⁷ Thus the Adventist claim that Rottmayer and his family converted is in truth an exaggeration. Only Magdolna Rottmayer and Johann Rottmayer’s granddaughter, Christine Rottmayer, the daughter of Johann Rottmayer Jr., unquestionably lived out their lives as Adventists.

baptism under Oncken, and his early ministry in Pest until the ‘sad time’ of 1850, when the work was effectively brought to an end; still his conclusion was positive: ‘My dear friends, I can say from experience that it is good to live in the Lord, remain in Him all of you.’⁵⁸ No mention is made of Mrs Rottmayer. The impression one receives from the article is of an elder Baptist pioneer rejoicing at the wedding of his daughter.

What stands behind this happy picture is the trip Csopják made to Kolozsvár earlier in the year to ask for Maria’s hand in marriage from her father. During Csopják’s time with his frail future father-in-law, the old gentleman complained to him in confidence about the ‘spiritual pressure’ he experienced at the hands of his aggressive wife, who used his advanced age and frailty to, as Bányai described it, ‘hold him under a veritable terror’.⁵⁹ He further confessed that ‘for the sake of peace’ he endured the ritualistic observances and practices imposed upon him by his wife’s Adventist beliefs.⁶⁰ This testimony has been confirmed on numerous occasions by others, particularly by Maria Rottmayer Csopják, who ‘for many years afterwards would tearfully remember these things’.⁶¹ It is important to note that this testimony from Attila Csopják comes after both the period of time from 1893 to 1894 when Conradi claimed Rottmayer threw his lot fully behind the SDA, and the 1895 baptisms and founding of the Kolozsvár congregation.

This testimony also puts into perspective the fact that beginning in August of 1898, Adventist services were held in Rottmayer’s house under Huenergardt’s leadership with Rottmayer in attendance. Pechtol and Szigeti spoke of still living witnesses from the foundation of the Kolozsvár congregation who could testify to Rottmayer’s Adventist faith.⁶² Bányai argues, however, that it ‘is not possible to hold someone as a member of a church in the full meaning of the word if the person endures his

⁵⁸ ‘A mi örömünk’, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Bányai, ‘Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire’, p. 232. This judgement may appear harsh, but Mészáros also passed on testimony from Gyöngyike Csopják, Maria Rottmayer Csopják’s daughter, that Johann Rottmayer’s second wife was the exact opposite of his first wife, who Maria described to her daughter as ‘angelic natured’ (Kálmán Mészáros, *A Magyarországi Baptista Egyház Vázlatos Története*. A Baptista Theológiai Szeminárium Egyháztörténeti Tanszékének Jegyzetei [Lecture-notes for the Church History Department of the Baptist Theological Seminary] (Budapest: Privately published, 1985), p. 25).

⁶⁰ Bányai, ‘Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire’, p. 232. Besides observing the Sabbath, this entailed certain dietary restrictions which the Adventists practiced in the spirit of the OT purity laws. Moreover, Bányai suggests that in addition to the great distance between Rottmayer’s suburban home and the Baptist meeting place, Rottmayer likely did not attend Baptist services to keep peace in the house.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 232. This testimony was passed from mother to daughter, and then from Gyöngyike Csopják Marosi in oral testimony to Bányai.

⁶² Pechtol, et al., ‘Megjegyzések ‘Az erdélyi és alföldi Baptista misszió kezdeti korszakai’ című cikkhez’, p. 100.

membership in the denomination under the influence of external pressure'.⁶³ Like Pechtol and Szigeti, Bányai could appeal to a still living witness from the Kolozsvár Baptist congregation for testimony concerning Rottmayer's denominational allegiance. This was Károly Papp Sr., a Baptist who was a friend to Rottmayer during his last years.⁶⁴ After his arrival in Kolozsvár in 1895, Papp Sr. held it to be his responsibility, in his words, 'to frequently visit the ailing brother Rottmayer'.⁶⁵ When the question of Rottmayer's alleged Adventist allegiance was broached, he responded with pain, 'Brother Rottmayer was never a Sabbatarian! He never gave up his religious principles, and he persevered in his faith until his death in 1901.'⁶⁶ The claim that Rottmayer became an Adventist, in Papp Sr.'s view, was a result of his wife's defection from the Baptist faith.

If Rottmayer's second wife had preceded him to the grave, thus removing from the scene the source of the 'spiritual pressure' upon himself to participate in Adventist life in Kolozsvár, the issue of Rottmayer's denominational allegiance would have received a definitive answer. In the end, even if a definitive answer is not possible, nevertheless the preponderance of the evidence strongly suggests that Rottmayer was compelled to live as an Adventist, but in his heart he remained a Baptist.⁶⁷ The consistent and plausible testimony from those closest to the elderly Rottmayer, his daughter and son-in-law, that he remained a committed Baptist despite appearances, that he was in fact compelled by his ill-tempered wife to live as an Adventist, is convincing testimony of Rottmayer's denominational faithfulness. This testimony also explains the fact that Rottmayer was always viewed as a fellow Baptist by other Baptists, such as Mihály Kornya and Heinrich Meyer. When one also considers the inconsistencies and apparent spin in the testimony of Conradi, the case for Rottmayer's denominational faithfulness appears all the stronger.⁶⁸

⁶³ Bányai, 'Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire', p. 232.

⁶⁴ Papp Sr. was born in 1875. He eventually became the pastor of the Kolozsvár church. In 1966 at the time Bányai wrote his article Papp Sr. was 91 years of age.

⁶⁵ Bányai, 'Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire', p. 231.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 231.

⁶⁷ We know from Maria Rottmayer that at first her father appeared to be swayed by Conradi's theological arguments, but that he was unable to bring himself to change his Baptist identity. Conradi further spoke of the Baptists' attempt to sway Rottmayer from following his wife and daughter. Rottmayer therefore had a good deal of time to mull over the different theological arguments, and in the end he remained a Baptist by conviction. This was despite the pressure brought to bear upon him by his wife. Perhaps in the end Maria Rottmayer was herself swayed by her father's witness in the face of such pressure to return to her Baptist roots? Perhaps this also accounted for the emotion with which she remembered her father's final years?

⁶⁸ To this Bányai adds the ironic fact that Conradi eventually left the SDA and 'joined a Baptist church'. (Bányai, 'Válasz Pechtol János és Szigeti Jenő megjegyzéseire', p. 232) While this is strictly true, what

The battle for Johann Rottmayer was, unfortunately, carried to his grave. In the spring of 1901, while Rottmayer was working in his orchard pruning his fruit trees, he fell off the ladder and became bed-ridden as a result. During his long convalescence he contracted pneumonia. Sensing that her husband would soon die, Rottmayer's wife contacted Huenergardt, who was living in Budapest at that time, to hurry down to Kolozsvár. He arrived to find an unconscious old man in his last struggle. Rottmayer died soon after. Of his father's death, Rottmayer Jr. simply wrote, 'On March 26, 1901, in his 84th year he closed his eyes. His return home was peaceful, his blessed memory lives on. Praised be the Lord's holy name!'⁶⁹ No mention was made concerning the controversy that surrounded his father's final years, or his funeral.⁷⁰

A few days after his death, Rottmayer was buried in the Lutheran section of the *házsongradi* cemetery.⁷¹ The service was, according to Mrs Rottmayer's instructions, performed by Huenergardt. About this Papp Sr. commented, 'At that time Mrs Rottmayer, for understandable reasons, kept secret her husband's death and his funeral... He was buried in the presence of the Sabbatarians... the Kolozsvár Baptist Church unfortunately only learned about all of this after the burial.'⁷² Against this report Christine Rottmayer Kessel, the daughter of Johann Rottmayer Jr., who eventually married the Adventist pastor in Kolozsvár, wrote that 'Baptist brethren were also present at the burial, because everybody loved him.'⁷³ Gyöngyi Csopják Marosi offered a reconciliation of these two pictures based upon conversations with her mother. The Baptists were represented at the funeral by her father and mother, the family of Rottmayer Jr., and one or two local Baptists who lived close by Rottmayer.⁷⁴ Perhaps the final word on Rottmayer's denominational faithfulness and legacy comes from the Kolozsvár daily of the period, *Ellenzék [Opposition]*, which in a February

Bányai failed to mention was that Conradi joined the Seventh Day Baptists denomination, and became the founder of the 'Deutschen Bund der Siebenten-Tags-Baptistengemeinden' (Heinz, *Ludwig Richard Conradi: Missionar der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Europa*, p. 111).

⁶⁹ Johann Rottmayer, Jr. 'Rottmayer János'. *Emléklapok*. Jubileumi füzetek 2. Ed. Imre Somogyi (Budapest: Magvető, 1948), p.27.

⁷⁰ It is odd that Rottmayer Jr. did not directly address this controversy. One could argue that he made his view known by writing of his father as he did, simply assuming that he was always a Baptist. After all his brother-in-law, Attila Csopják, did the same in his history of the Hungarian Baptist movement. Perhaps his reticence stemmed from the fact that his daughter had converted to Adventism while visiting her grandparents, and took a different view of things? Thus he was constrained by family concerns in a way that Maria Rottmayer Csopják and her husband were not.

⁷¹ Bányai, 'Az erdélyi és alföldi baptista misszió kezdeti korszaka', *Theologiai Szemle* 9, new series, 1–2 (1966), p. 36.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

11, 1902, article described Rottmayer after his death as a pillar of 'Anabaptism'.⁷⁵

What began as a simple research trip for Conradi into Transylvania eventually developed into a mission point described as the 'cradle of Adventism' in Austria-Hungary. It is evident, however, that Johann Rottmayer cannot be called the 'father' of Hungarian Adventists in any meaningful sense, and it is undeniable that he was not the first Hungarian Adventist. If then the Hungarian Adventists do not have a true indigenous father, the converse of this conclusion is that they do have a mother – Magdolna Rottmayer. She is the person who Conradi described as the 'first' Adventist in Hungary, having travelled up to Hamburg to join the church in that city, as there was as yet none to join in Hungary. It was she who encouraged Maria Rottmayer's fleeting Adventist faith and service, and likely encouraged Krisztina Rottmayer's conversion. It was she who constrained her husband to live as an Adventist and she was the true host and patron of the first Adventist congregation in Hungary. She was the nexus between the German-American Adventist missionaries Conradi and Huenergardt and the 'cradle of Adventism in Austria-Hungary', Kolozsvár. This the Hungarian Baptists concede, and this the Hungarian Adventists should embrace as their actual heritage and story.

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⁷⁵ Olivér Szebeni, *A magyarországi baptista egyház történelme [The History of the Hungarian Baptist Church]*. Tanulmányi anyag a Baptista Teológiai Szeminárium számára [Instructional material for the Baptist Theological Seminary] (Budapest: Baptista Teológiai Szeminárium, 1967), p. 22.

Wilderness in the Bible and the Wild Places of the Earth

This paper sets out to bring together on the one hand a couple of books on wilderness in the Bible, one on the wilderness tradition in the Hebrew Bible by Terry L Burden,¹ a teacher in Kentucky, the other an attempt to set out a theology of wilderness by Robert Barry Leal,² a university professor in Sydney, and on the other an exploration of contemporary wilderness in the work and writing of John Muir, a 19th century leading naturalist and the founder of the National Park Movement in the USA, and to see both against the background of the current ecological emphasis on the environment such as you find in Brueggeman,³ Habel⁴ and a growing number of biblical scholars and theologians.

Definition

Leal suggests that it was only in the latter half of the 20th century that biblical scholars and theologians began to take seriously such issues as the natural order, the land and the environment, wilderness and wild places, and even then they were much more reluctant to take the issues on board than their forebears had been a century earlier to buy into the popular scientific attitudes which saw nature as something that was entirely under human control. Today, with the emphasis on global warming and all matters ecological and environmental, there is some evidence that biblical scholarship is catching up, with comments like that of Carol Ochs⁵ (teacher at the Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City) to the effect that wilderness is ‘the single most informative experience in the creation of the Jewish people’ alongside Ulrich Mauser⁶ (Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary) who says that without it the development of religion in the Old Testament would be ‘unintelligible’.

¹ Terry L Burden, *The Kerygma of the Wilderness Traditions in the Hebrew Bible*, American University Studies, Series VII, Theology and Religion, 163 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), p. 163.

² Robert B Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible, Towards a Theology of Wilderness*, Studies in Biblical Literature 72 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004).

³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

⁴ Norman C Habel, *The Land is Mine*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Norman C Habel and Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, The Earth Bible, 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001); Norman C Habel (ed), *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, The Earth Bible, 4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001).

⁵ Carol Ochs, ‘The Desert, Biblical Spirituality and Creation’, in *Sewanee Theological Review*, 36, Michaelmas, p. 493 (1993 Belford Lecture).

⁶ Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 29.

Burden similarly finds the concept of wilderness running right through the Old Testament and featuring prominently in the New. In the Old Testament, he says, Israel's belief in herself and her understanding of the acts of God depend on the wilderness tradition, and the whole Hebrew-Jewish tradition itself is shaped by Israel's experience of wilderness over the years. In other words the wilderness tradition is the result of interaction between God's land and God's people, different in different times and in different places, constitutive and not prophetic. In the New Testament, somewhat similarly but different, wilderness features prominently in the Temptations narrative, in John the Baptist⁷ (*arrioj* = wild honey = 'belonging to the field') and as the dwelling place for the mentally deranged.

But does the Bible understand by 'wilderness' what we understand and how does it relate to what we mean when we talk about wilderness or 'wild places'?

In the RSV the word 'wilderness' occurs 245 times in the Old Testament and 35 times in the New, but the word in the original is not always the same. The most common word in the Old Testament is *midhbar*, but *midhbar* is not so much arid desert as grazing land, mainly in the foothills of Palestine. Joel, for example, refers to 'the pastures of the wilderness' not exploited for agricultural purposes (1:19, 1:20, 2:22). Its root meaning is 'to drive out' and so *midbhar* is the place to which shepherds drove out their flocks.

Another word is *arabah*, best translated by 'steppe', and that could be a large region or simply a small limited space. In Genesis 36:24, for example, Anah finds hot springs there, in 1 Samuel 17:28 David is charged with having left his sheep there and in 2 Chronicles 26:10 the wilderness has flowers and cisterns for large herds. Over time it seems to have come to mean the large sparsely populated areas beyond the land used for agriculture.

In the LXX and in the New Testament the word is *erhmoj*, with a root meaning of abandonment, and may refer not only to a locality but also to a person or a cause. So, in the case of John the Baptist in the wilderness or

⁷ 'A voice crying in the wilderness' (Isaiah 40: 3), Muir further resembled John the Baptist in that John baptised with water, claimed stones could raise up children to Abraham (Luke 3: 8), Luke 3: 4-6 and Matthew 3: 3 read almost like glacial action preparing for life, and Muir's message was a call to repentance addressed to the whole of society. (Richard Cartwright Austin, *Baptised into Wilderness, A Christian Perspective on John Muir*, Environmental Theology 1 (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 87).

Jesus on the Mount of Temptation it is a complex mix of environment, mental state and a deep sense of isolation due to emotional stress.

Going back to the Old Testament, of those 245 references not less than 100 are in the Pentateuch; all dealing with the wanderings from Egypt to Canaan, but the emphasis is much more on everything that happened there rather than on what it was like to live in the wilderness. The wilderness was little more than a backcloth for everything else, and what it does, according to Burden, is to intensify the emotions of danger, fear, isolation and loneliness (all emotions closely linked with religion), much as light effects and music intensify feelings in a play or a film. That is to say, the geographical wilderness underlines and brings out the emotional wilderness. Wilderness is a place of solitude, where all things are fragile needing special care and attention.

When we come to the prophets, literal wilderness is rare. What we find there is much more wilderness imagery and, except for Jeremiah (for whom it is a place of anger and judgement), the overall impression is of restoration which is intensified once we get to the period in Babylon, the return and the diaspora.

Wilderness imagery in the Psalms is even stronger and the images more varied. Burden finds, for example, that in the Psalms wilderness is referred to variously as a place of renewal (water and miracles), sometimes literal sometimes metaphorical (Ps 65: 9-16); a place of deliverance where God provides food and water (Ps 105: 39-43); a sign of the guiding hand of God and a receptive attitude on the part of the community (Ps 78: 12-16. Cf Neh 9: 12-15); a place of reclamation, to make room for cities and vineyards (Ps 107: 4, 33-38); a place where faith is tested (Ps 95) and one of a series of experiences recited as a thanksgiving (Ps 136: 16).

Leal says something similar, drawing attention to both positive and negative images.⁸

So to sum up, wilderness in the Bible is not all vastness, nothingness, horror and disaster, though all those elements are there. It is rather a very diverse arena — almost a cauldron — in which all life takes place, where everything interacts with everything and everybody, and against which everything and everybody must be judged and valued. It is an image capable of arousing and nurturing the most diverse emotions, and the

⁸ Leal identifies four broad attitudes: negative (fear, repulsion, hostility), a place of critical encounter of personal and national significance (despite the horrors), the site of God's grace (where he purifies and transforms) and an aspect of God's good creation, to be treated with awe and respect. Positive responses may be of two kinds, those which are corrective and those which are theophanies and revelations though often only perceived and appreciated as such years later in retrospect.

location of some of the most startling encounters between a human being and God, beginning with Hagar in the wilderness right through at least to two people on the road to Emmaus and Paul on the road to Damascus.

Like it, love it or hate it, it is there. It is God's gift. It is the very crucible of life. It is where you find God, and God finds you. For many centuries, and almost from the beginning of the Christian era, that crucible has been taken to mean the crucible of *human* life. Human beings saw themselves as the crown of creation and assumed a position of power and dominance, admittedly with some sense of responsibility but usually a sense of responsibility judged by what was best for humanity.

In the last half-century two things have brought about change. One (the more recent) is the emphasis on the environment and ecology, global warming, shortage of fossil fuels, the need for new sources of energy and so on. The other is the life and work of John Muir whose legacy is now coming into its own as he re-shapes our thinking on the natural order, the wonder and reality of the rest of creation in its own right, and a more appropriate role for humanity within that crucible. To him we now turn.

John Muir (1838-1913)

Long before it became fashionable among biblical scholars to develop a theology of the wilderness, John Muir was working out his own theology. Often described as one of the greatest naturalists the world has ever known, he founded the John Muir Trust in Britain, the parallel Sierra Club in the USA and the concept of National Parks worldwide. So what did he see when he looked at the wild places of the earth? And how can he help us to a more biblical understanding of those wild places and to re-read some of those biblical passages about wilderness with greater understanding as a result of a richer wilderness experience?

The Man

We have to begin with Muir the man, because the starting point is that Muir was driven into the wilderness by religion — bad religion — the religion of a tyrannical father — and there in the wilderness (not unlike Moses who fled from the terror to the wilderness, and many others, possibly including Jesus) Muir found a new faith.

He was born in Scotland and spent most of his life in the United States. His father, Daniel, had been converted at an early age to a particularly vicious brand of Presbyterianism, and with every theological

lurch to the right Daniel was always in the vanguard. For Daniel there was only ever one god, and Daniel (at least in his own estimation) was his prophet. He was a God of wrath. Sweat and pain were the passports to heaven and John's childish misdemeanours were severely punished. 'If you want to learn to swim,' he told his children, 'go to the frogs and they will give you all the lessons you need.' On another occasion he forced John to dig a ninety foot well on their farm, eight feet of it through a fine, hard sandstone, cramped in a space about three feet in diameter, chipping away with heavy hammer and chisel from morn till dusk, day after day, and his father never gave an hour to help him.

Besides being studious and an avid reader John was inventive. He loved intricate machinery, all the parts working together towards a desired end. This was what gave him his first great insight to the workings of the natural world — hence one of his aphorisms, 'When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything in the universe.' His father showed not the slightest interest in anything he did and in the end John concluded that if his father's world was the world of the civilised creeds of the Christian faith he preferred the softer sanctuary of wild nature.

In 1867, he had an eye accident which blinded him for a month and when he regained his sight he knew exactly what he had to do with his life. His eyes were opened. The blind man began to see. So instead of going to medical school as intended he set off on a thousand-mile walk from Louisville, Kentucky, to the Gulf of Mexico, living virtually as a tramp, but all the time observing nature and absorbing everything. And there, in that experience of wild places, he discovered an unbounded passion for the mountains, sublime, holy and awesome, with everything perfectly clean and full of divine lessons. He knew he belonged there. In an entry for June 6th in 'My First Summer in the Siera' (EWDB, p. 195) he wrote, 'we are now in the mountains and they are in us'. He so much preferred them to the lowlands. In the lowlands people blasted roads out of solid rocks, dams and streams to work in mines like slaves, whereas in the mountains tracks and trails were more like light ornamental stitching or embroidery.

After what he came to regard as a conversion experience he then became every bit as religious, and certainly no less passionate than his father, but in a different way, and is reported to have said that. John the Baptist was no more eager to get all his fellow-sinners into the Jordan than Muir was to baptise all of his in the beauty of God's mountains.

But was his passion for natural religion rather than creeds and doctrine simply an escape from the claustrophobia of his father's faith or was it a rediscovery of his father's faith in places his father had never thought of looking?

To answer that I want to examine five main areas.

Muir's Language

First, language. Religious people, especially extremists, are renowned for their specialist and esoteric language. As you might expect, Muir knew it all — he'd grown up with it — but now he preferred to relate it to his new-found vision rather than his father's faith.

So, if people feel 'tired of the world' or 'choked in the sediments of society', he tells them to take to the hills, wash in their streams, bask among the flowers. This way their doubts will disappear, their carnal incrustations melt off, and their souls breathe deep and free in God's atmosphere of beauty and love. This is Muir's understanding of new birth — relationships which are not primarily exploitative or economic, but sensuous, loving and respectful⁹ — and it calls for the baptism that will make you a new creature. 'Never,' he says, 'shall I forget my baptism in this font. It happened in January, a resurrection day for many a plant and for me.'¹⁰ If people want 'resurrection', he sends them in February to witness a plant-resurrection — myriads of bright flowers crowding from the ground, like souls to a judgement. So we have conversion, baptism and resurrection.

For other examples of his use of religious language notice how he saw nature not as a hierarchy but as communion, how Jesus reversed the social hierarchies of nature ('the last shall be first') by giving at least as much attention to nature as to people, and how his vision of a peacable kingdom akin to Isaiah 11: 6-9, with Christ as 'the little child' and God as the Gentle Persuader, was more religious insight than precious ecology.¹¹

So what about buildings? Close by Yosemite National Park there is a mountain called Cathedral. Naturally that mountain had a special appeal for him, but then Muir saw every mountain as a cathedral, offering all the benefits of cathedrals made with hands and more besides. Mountains even a hundred miles away held a 'spiritual power' over him. With a capacity to

⁹ Austin, *Baptised into Wilderness, A Christian Perspective on John Muir*, p. 78.

¹⁰ *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, in John Muir, *The Eight Wilderness-Discovery Books* (London: Diadem Books and Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992) (hereon referred to as EWDB), p. 182.

¹¹ Austin, *Baptised into Wilderness, A Christian Perspective on John Muir*, pp. 19, 79.

transcend time and distance they were as near as a circle of friends. Sitting beneath pines more than two hundred feet high, he is thrilled. They are not crowded together, and as the sunbeams stream through their feathery arches brightening the ground, he walks beneath the radiant ceiling in devout subdued mood as if 'in a grand cathedral with mellow light sifting through coloured windows', the whole landscape glowing with consciousness, 'like the face of a god', as 'the hours go by uncounted'.¹² Here is 'heaven and the dwelling place of the angels'.¹³ Were he tethered to a stake or tree there for ever he would live with the satisfaction of 'a new heaven and a new earth' and be content with nothing more than 'bread and . . . water', with 'creation just beginning', the morning stars 'still singing together and all the sons of God shouting for joy'.¹⁴

Put that alongside Moses and the burning bush, Elijah and the still small voice, Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones, or Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and explore the depth. For Muir, the wilderness is a place where you should expect to find God.

A Place for Theophanies

Secondly, for that reason, and again in common with the biblical tradition, wilderness is a place for theophanies. Why? Because Muir's God was every bit as active and involved in that natural world as he was in humanity. Muir's God of Wild Places would always ensure a rich provision for all his creatures but to appreciate him you had to be alert enough to know where to find that provision, diligent enough to go out and seek it, and sensitive enough to recognise it when it was at hand.

One of the best examples is that of the first theophany, Hagar (Genesis 16:7-14; 21:8-20), especially as presented by the story-telling skills of a Trevor Dennis.¹⁵

Dennis finds two scenes in the story of Hagar. First, is 'the God Who Sees' as Hagar in her misery runs away into the wilderness and sits down in her loneliness to bemoan her fate, only to be told by God to go back and try again — God has a different purpose for her. As Dennis tells it, the message is not that Hagar goes into the wilderness and finds God, but rather that in the wilderness she 'sees God'. Why? Because first of all God sees her, and she has the eye to behold him. Not Hagar's recognition of the

¹² *Our National Parks*, EWDB, p. 491.

¹³ *My First Summer in the Sierra*, EWDB p. 268.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *The Book of Books. The Bible Retold* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003), pp. 45-47, 50-53.

God of the wilderness. But Hagar's recognition of being seen by the God of the wilderness. It is not that we need to find God in the wilderness, but that we need to allow the God of the wilderness to find us and then to have the grace to recognise him.

In the second scene Dennis offers 'the God Who Saves'. How? Only when in the wilderness Hagar faces the prospect of her child dying of hunger and thirst and knowing that before long she will follow him. All they need to survive is water. And the water is there. But it is only when she feels the urge to pick Ishmael up and give him a big hug, creating genuine warmth and affection in the wilderness, does she suddenly spot the well of water which had been there all the time. That water was the source of new life for them both. All she needed was to spot it, and that only happened when she found someone else in the wilderness and responded to them. To Muir, that reading would have been meat and drink.

Nature is a Palimpsest

Thirdly, Burden described the wilderness tradition as the result of interaction between God's land and God's people. Muir perhaps is saying something similar when in one of his more helpful insights he refers to nature as a palimpsest. A palimpsest is a simple tablet, papyrus or other document on which history has written one layer after another without anything ever being erased to the point where even the most recent is virtually unreadable and the previous ones totally indecipherable. Yet there is not an error in it and every single contribution still holds all its original meaning.

Herbert F Smith,¹⁶ writing on Muir's acute sensitivity, says this is exactly how Muir saw nature — a collection of fragments each complete in itself, yet all the time revealing itself in different ways, shaping and re-shaping itself with the intricacy of complex machinery (one of his boyhood interests) and presenting a different picture, and it is only our limited perception that prevents us from adequately appreciating the meaning of the whole and adjusting to the change.

Put like that a biblical parallel may not immediately spring to mind but closely related to Burden's interaction between the people and the land and Muir's unreadable palimpsest is a major tenet of Judaism (somewhat lost in later Christianity) that this whole crucible of life is constantly on the move with no final resting place.

¹⁶ H F Smith, *John Muir* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965).

Franziska Bark,¹⁷ commenting on Numbers 33 (vv 1, 16-23), for example, notes of the Children of Israel that ‘they removed . . . pitched . . . journeyed . . . pitched . . . went . . . pitched . . . removed . . . (and) encamped . . .’ but in the Torah they never arrive. Deuteronomy stops on the threshold. Fulfilment must wait till Joshua. The promise of Canaan (Exodus 6) may be what gets them going, maybe what defines both the goal and the direction, but the arrival is not the sole aim and purpose. For the Jews the life is in the wandering, not in the arriving. For Muir it is in the ongoing nature of the natural world, of which humanity is a part, reflected in the palimpsest.

In other words, both Muir’s palimpsest and Numbers offer us a view of a world (an arena, a wilderness) in constant change where each generation has to work things out for itself, leaving behind a tradition on which others will do the same. This is perhaps why Muir hated hiking. Hiking, he said, suggests goals and we are never likely to arrive at them; more important to be aware that everything we touch touches everything else.¹⁸ Wilderness is a place where the satisfaction comes from the travelling as you interact with God and the whole of your environment.

To Blossom as God Intended

Fourthly, we come to the question as to whether the appropriate response to wilderness is to blossom (and to allow other things and other people also) to blossom as God intended — to allow things to be and to appreciate their beauty; not to try to recreate the wilderness according to our specifications. Muir prefers a crab apple to a cultured apple, not because the crab apple is better but because he takes exception to the view that anything nature produces is coarse and can and must be eradicated by human culture. Too often, he says, our modifications can be positively damaging to the original species, citing the effects of human culture on wild roses, producing petals at the expense of stamens.

So imagine his excitement when he found evidence that wild wool growing on mountain sheep around Mount Shasta was much finer than the average grades of cultivated wool. On one trip he selected three fleeces — one from a large ram, one from a ewe and a third from a yearling — and after close examination, he shouted: ‘Well done for wildness! Wild wool is finer than tame!’ And when his companions checked the fleeces for themselves it was right. Similarly, in a comparison of wild sheep with

¹⁷ ‘Time and Torah’, in *Judaism* Vol 49, No 3 (Issue 195, Summer 2000), pp. 259-68.

¹⁸ Austin, *Baptised into Wilderness, A Christian Perspective on John Muir*, p. 90.

domestic sheep he finds domestic sheep expressionless, like a dull bundle of something only half-alive, while the wild sheep is as elegant and graceful as a deer, every moment manifesting admirable strength and character. The tame is timid. The wild is bold.¹⁹

But then his friends told him that wild sheep may have finer wool but Mary's lamb had more, to which he replied that wild wool was not made for humans but for sheep and that if wild sheep in the Sierra were to have Mary's wool only a few would survive a single season.²⁰ Why does the quantity argument always seem to win? Why is it well-nigh impossible to obtain a hearing on behalf of nature from any other standpoint than that of human use?

Then comes a purple passage asserting that wildness needs no explanation.

'Nature is a good mother, and sees well to the clothing of her many bairns', he writes, citing birds with feathers, beetles with shining jackets and bears with shaggy furs, with thinly clad animals in the tropics and warmly clothed animals in the arctic, the squirrel with socks and mittens and a tail broad enough for a blanket, not to mention the mole 'living always in the dark and in the dirt, yet as clean as the otter'.

Muir's gospel is for partnership (*à la* Francis of Assisi) rather than domination and control (*à la* traditional understandings of Genesis). God's rainbow covenant (Genesis 9: 8-10), in which God promises to protect the web of life, and to draw all creatures into the history of salvation, goes way beyond humanity and has been sadly neglected in much biblical scholarship.²¹ There are psalms summoning all living things, along with rivers and hills, to praise God (Psalm 98: 7-9), and there may be some evidence in the heart of the biblical wilderness that God had his own ground rules²² because when fire breaks out in the wilderness (Num 11: 1-3) and the people cry for help Yahweh stops it, but then when snakes and serpents bite people the snakes and serpents are not removed, though in due course a means is established whereby anyone bitten can be cured and live (Num 21: 4-9). Does this perhaps suggest divine recognition that nature has its place too but any threat to life must be countered?

¹⁹ *The Mountains of California*, EWDB, pp. 419-428.

²⁰ An essay from *Steep Trails*, EWDB, pp. 871-6.

²¹ Austin, op.cit., p. 57. Cf Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant, Biblical themes of justice, peace and the integrity of creation*, Heythrop Monographs 7 (Westminster, Md: Christian Classics and London: Sheed & Ward, 1992), *passim*.

²² For a fuller treatment of his defence of wildness see Austin, *Baptised into Wilderness, A Christian Perspective on John Muir*, pp. 79-82.

Again and again, in season and out of season, Muir writes, ‘the question comes up, ‘What are rattlesnakes good for?’ As if nothing that does not obviously make for the benefit of man had any right to exist; as if our ways were God’s ways. Long ago, an Indian to whom a French traveller put this old question replied that their tails were good for toothache, and their heads for fever. Anyhow, he adds, they are all, head and tail, good for themselves, and we need not begrudge them their share of life.’²³

Renewal in God’s Way

Isaiah 35 — that great chapter of wilderness renewal — invites us to see renewal in God’s way. The prophet is no doubt right when he says the desert will rejoice and blossom as the rose, but not necessarily like the rose we have learned to love and we may not instinctively feel the same about it. So with people. In Muir’s (and Burden’s) vast cauldron of interaction between God and his creation, people too are under threat — hands trembling, knees knocking, hearts thumping. Rejects and misfits see themselves as the undesirable ‘plants of the wilderness’, written off or regarded by others only as candidates for reform. All are threatened. All have a future, but not necessarily as some of those self-appointed wilderness reformers would determine (vv 3-4). And when the blind see and the deaf hear, it may not always be in the way many would wish (vv 5-6).

Muir’s wilderness is still wilderness, not sanitised, cultured, touristic wildness but a totally new and different ‘highway’ and when Isaiah says that ‘the unclean’ will not pass over, Muir would see it not as the exclusion of the undesirables but as a new way of appreciating their contribution — an insight not a million miles from the stories of Jesus. Read it, especially vv 8-9, in the light of the gospels. Isaiah, like Muir, yearns to see renewal, but renewal in God’s way, not ours.

A Harmony

Put like that there is no conflict between biblical wilderness and Muir’s wild places. On the contrary I prefer to see them as complementing each other to provide a harmony, and I can offer one further piece of evidence.

In the wilderness (biblical and Muir) the constant uncertainty of life has to be balanced by the constant rediscovery of purpose and a sense of

²³ *Our National Parks*, EWDB, pp. 481-2.

direction. The compass must always be kept intact. For Jews and Christians this has always meant regular worship: temple, synagogue, church. For Muir it meant immersing himself repeatedly in the wilderness. This is where he found awe and mysticism; this is where he saw pattern, design and unity; this is where he found pointers to the unity of God, and possibly explains why it was that the more he worshipped at this shrine the more he became aware of that unity between human beings and the rest of creation, even to the point where he refused to accept any distinction.

Put this alongside the story of Job. Job is a man who has lost his compass, and just about everything else. His life is in turmoil. He struggles in the wilderness of human experience but then, through his own torment, comes to appreciate the wider sufferings of the earth.²⁴ Chapter 28 shows profound insight into human attitudes to creation,²⁵ and in the final struggle with an unjust world Job hears the Voice of Earth as those Yahweh speeches (38-39) undermine the notion of human domination going back to Genesis 1: 26-28.²⁶

Once Job comes to terms with the false assumption that God's sole concern is with human beings, he abandons the misguided notion that we are the centre and crown of his creation, and gains a new respect for the rest, his personal internal and spiritual turmoil is healed, and what has been lost can be restored. Redemption fulfilled.

In the traditional sense Muir was not a Christian, but he was re-born, in the wild, through the wilderness, and he spent most of his time there — in solitude but never alone. Among trees, cliffs, rocks and waterfalls, he revelled in a place 'full of charming company, full of God's thoughts, a place of peace and safety amid the most exalted grandeur and eager enthusiastic action . . . with sermons in stones, storms, trees, flowers, and animals brimful of humanity'.²⁷ Truly a prophet of God. Like the biblical prophets he stood outside the priesthood, the institution and the structures normally thought to link God with people — not professionals (as Amos said) — not a moral interpreter — but one who speaks from a passion of strength and conviction.²⁸

²⁴ Alice M Sinnott, 'Cosmic Devastation and Social Turmoil', in Norman C Habel & Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions, The Earth Bible 3*, pp. 78-91.

²⁵ Katharine Dell, 'Plumbing the Depths of Earth: Job 28 and Deep Ecology', in Norman C Habel & Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions, The Earth Bible 3*, pp. 116-25.

²⁶ Norman C Habel, 'Challenging the Mandate to Dominate' in Norman C Habel & Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions, The Earth Bible 3*, pp. 179-89.

²⁷ *Our National Parks*, EWDB, p. 490.

²⁸ Austin, *Baptised into Wilderness, A Christian Perspective on John Muir*, p. 85.

So, for many reasons, I think we have to conclude that if it was the harshness of his upbringing that drove Muir from religion to the wilderness it was nevertheless the wilderness that greatly enriched his understanding of God.

Wilderness Yesterday and Today

The relevance of all this for today's debate on ecology and the environment must be the subject of another paper, but it is significant that Leal in his final section examines the ecotheological implications of biblical attitudes to wilderness in an attempt to move towards a theology of wilderness. Like Muir, he begins by demolishing that form of human imperialism which finds no problem with anthropocentrism and the human domination of nature. Unlike Muir he has difficulty with the idea that all of God's creation is good, which serves to underline the need to bring together the four attitudes he started with (negative, critical encounter, God's grace and God's good creation) and to relate them to contemporary ecology.

To do this he takes us to Australia where wilderness (whether called 'bush' or 'desert') is a determining factor in the way Australians see themselves and their country. Wilderness is responsible for the way in which the Aboriginal people have developed, with their strong sense of place and belonging, an understanding of 'the Land' as the abode of their ancestors and the source of their future — a place indeed where Past, Present and Future all coalesce — in contra distinction to western man's sense of domination. So that what is 'nothing' to the European or the colonist, to the Aboriginal is 'alive' and 'teeming with life-giving energies', and such a spiritually oriented appraisal of the landscape may well be the way not only to save the environment but also to promote reconciliation between the two cultures. Norman Habel and his colleagues, also from the same part of the world, are saying much the same thing in *The Earth Bible*.

Muir's Death

Finally, if Muir and the contemporary movement for the conservation of the wild places of the earth have much in common with the wilderness in the Bible, Muir's death was no exception.

On a visit to his daughter, Helen, in December 1914, he went out for a walk in the wilderness but that evening he was taken ill and died of pneumonia on Christmas Eve. The previous year, in a journal, with some

prescience, Muir had written, 'I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.'²⁹

Thus Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him. (Genesis 5:24). Thus Elijah, standing by the Jordan, took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted ... Elijah and Elisha crossed on dry ground. As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kings 2: 8, 11). Thus, from a different kind of wilderness, Mr Valiant-for-Truth in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*³⁰ also came with his friends to the riverside. As he went down into the water he said, 'Death, where is thy sting?' And as he went down deeper, he said, 'Grave, where is thy victory?' So he passed over and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

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²⁹ Terry Gifford, Introduction to John Muir, EWDB, pp. 15-17.

³⁰ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 2, ed by James Blanton Wharey, second edition revised by Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 309.

‘What it means to be human: Evangelical and Orthodox perspectives’

**Report on a seminar at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey,
10-16 July 2006**

The Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, near Geneva, was founded in 1952 to provide training for lay people as well as clergy. It is linked with the WCC and the University of Geneva, as it runs graduate programmes in ecumenical studies. As an ‘ecumenical laboratory’, it provides the space for unofficial yet substantive talks on major issues confronting the churches today. Several seminars take place each year, in beautiful surroundings; for details, see the WCC website at www.wcc-coe.org/bossey.

This seminar was the fourth in a series intended to bring Evangelicals and Orthodox together in dialogue at an international level, and was co-sponsored by the WCC’s office for Church and Ecumenical Relations; among other things, this office is charged with developing links between the WCC and non-member churches, including Evangelicals and Pentecostals. Bossey’s director, Prof Ioan Sauca, is a Romanian Orthodox priest and missiologist who is strongly committed to getting the two traditions talking to each other. Each meeting has taken a major issue and explored areas of agreement and disagreement, with papers, workshops and other presentations, as well as informal discussion and shared worship. Previous years have looked at Salvation (2000), the Bible (2002), and the Church (2004). They were preceded by a series of high-level meetings sponsored by the WCC, at Stuttgart (1993), Alexandria (1995) and Hamburg (1998). The impetus for these arose from the discovery that Orthodox and Evangelicals shared many concerns about the contemporary ecumenical scene, and in particular about some of the theology articulated at the WCC’s Seventh Assembly at Canberra in 1991.

As an Evangelical, I had been invited to be co-organiser with Fr Sauca, and spent a weekend at Bossey two months before to prepare for it. That time proved to have been well spent, but we also sensed God’s presence in a remarkable way, taking over and transcending our preparations – one of those occasions when you know that you have been standing on holy ground. It was, as one participant described it, ‘an extraordinary experience’.

Personally, I had been wondering what future there was for this dialogue; I have been involved in it for over nine years, and edited a book on the subject, but so few seemed to take it seriously. However, this time

there was an encouraging attendance, with over twenty Evangelicals and Orthodox from various countries: the UK, the USA, Switzerland, Romania, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine and the Philippines. There were two bishops (one Orthodox and one Baptist), several professors of theology, and others involved in various forms of Christian work. What was extraordinary was the way that the group bonded together, and relationships were formed, even across the great divide which is often perceived to separate our two traditions. Participants told moving stories of their experiences of contact between the two traditions; so often, it is marked by ignorance and suspicion, but it was clear that this need not be the case. Most days we shared in Evangelical and Orthodox worship, and spent time in informal conversation over meals and elsewhere. We also spent a morning at the WCC offices, the highlight of which was our meeting with its general secretary, the Revd Dr Samuel Kobia. He has a clear vision of how such dialogue can feed into various aspects of the WCC's work, which is encouraging because it may help to sharpen the focus of our discussions.

Several presentations were given, engaging with each tradition's understanding of theological anthropology; speakers included Dr Mark Elliott (St Andrew's University, Scotland), Prof Andrew Louth (Durham, England), Prof Jim Stamoolis (Trinity International University, USA), and Prof Stelian Tofana (Cluj, Romania). Small groups explored further the areas of convergence and divergence between our traditions, and considered (i) what we can do together to witness in our world to our understanding as Christians of what it means to be human, and (ii) the possibilities for further Evangelical–Orthodox dialogue and contact.

The proceedings of this and previous seminars will be published next year by Bossey, as a book. It is intended to distribute this to church officials and theological colleges throughout Europe and beyond, as well as being available for other interested individuals. The next seminar will probably be in 2008, and anyone who is interested may apply to attend. Details will appear on the WCC's website, but if you know of anyone who would like to receive e-mail notification, let me know (grass.family@tesco.net). We are in the process of forming a continuation committee to prepare for further seminars, to consider how to promote dialogue, and to investigate funding sources. Finally, please pray for this work and the thoughtful reception of its conclusions; we stand on the verge of some exciting opportunities to make a contribution to the building up of the Body of Christ.

Dr Tim Grass

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Book Review

Shaynah Neshama

All Shall be Well

Tree of Life Publishing House, Los Angeles, California, 2006, 315 pp.

What can you say about a book that opens up the inner spaces and exposes the soul? It is rare for a piece of Christian writing to both move me to tears and also lift me to the heights of exhilaration and celebration of God's love, but this book does exactly that.

Wherein lies the secret? Partly, it is in the subject matter. Shaynah Neshama weaves together two lives, separated by 700 years in time but joined together in life's joys, pains, exhilarations and sorrows. One is a creative, biographical expansion of the life of the much loved medieval Christian mystic, Julian of Norwich. We are brought into the sights and sounds of soul and society in this lady's life, as she copes with the huge tragedies of her time, when the bubonic plague struck with such terror. The other is in the construction of a life all too familiar to us: a young girl, abused in childhood and growing into puberty with all the potential to become an abuser herself. Shaynah Neshama draws on the deep insights she has gained through studying and teaching theology, together with her experience of working in social work and child care, to present us with a tapestry full of the colours and shadows of human emotion and experience of pain, suffering, and God's love.

The secret is also expressed, though, in the style of writing. Shaynah Neshama is a Christian who is committed to narrative theology. She passionately believes that the deep truths concerning God and man are conveyed to us not through dispassionate, sterile statements, but through the tales of life and death, light and darkness, transformation and tragedy, that are the common lot of all men and women. She believes that a description of the circumstances and environments which the God of Incarnational revelation breaks into is the best way of testifying to and demonstrating the reality of God's love and care for people.

I would commend this book to anyone whose soul has become parched and thirstily, and offer it to those who are tired of abstracted ideas and fashionable philosophies. It is a book of colour and depth, making you cry and lifting you with joy. It will bring food and drink to your soul.

Jim Purves

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